

# LABOUR AND NATIONALISM IN IRELAND

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**Or**

MARY AUGUSTA CLARKSON



## PREFACE

“DEMOCRACY AND NATIONALISM”—in that brief phrase are frequently epitomised the hopes and aspirations, the struggling and striving of Western Europe in the nineteenth century. These were the forces, arising immediately from the Industrial Revolution, whose working was so fruitful of unrest and disturbance. But with the passage of time the forces of Democracy were transmuted into the forces of Labour, until to-day it is to Labour and Nationalism, singly or jointly, that we must turn in explication of unrest and disturbance. Democracy, in the political field, has become well-nigh a commonplace, but the struggle for its attainment has now passed over into the industrial field, for, much as modern states may vaunt the democracy of their political structure, the economic organisation of society remains anything but democratic. To the landed aristocracy has succeeded an industrial plutocracy; to the national monarch has succeeded a new shibboleth, the State. The capitalist-imperialist socio-political structure that dominates civilisation to-day invites attack on both flanks. Against its social aspect are directed the forces of Labour, recoiling from the cul-de-sac into which the slogan of Democracy had led them, against its political aspect are directed the forces of Nationalism, confusing the relations of both parties to the social struggle.

But if Labour and Nationalism are to the present time what Democracy and Nationalism were to the past century, it is a matter of considerable importance to ascertain the nature of their interworking. Much as in the middle of the

nineteenth century democrats and nationalists joined forces for the struggle against autocracy and imperialism, incarnate in the House of Austria, so in more recent times labourites and nationalists have sought to cooperate in their revolts against the established order. Nowhere, perhaps, can the attempt at fusion of the forces of Labour and Nationalism be so readily observed as in Ireland within the lifetime of the present generation. In 1848-49 the incompatibility of the aims of democrats and nationalists contributed mightily to the failure of the revolutionists; in twentieth-century Ireland the incompatibility of the aims of labourites and nationalists has been no less patent.

It is from such a standpoint that this study was undertaken. Though Ireland serves as the setting for this examination of the nature and effects of the overlapping of the aims of Labour and Nationalism, the present work is intended, not so much as an addition to the already voluminous but regrettably piecemeal literature of Irish history, as to afford a sidelight on the interrelations of two world forces. Ireland is but the matrix in which is imbedded one of the most shining examples of the product of those two agents, Labour and Nationalism.

To avoid doubts as to whether the social views of individuals treated in this book have been accurately presented, somewhat extended passages from their own writings have been incorporated into the text. For the sake of uniformity between such passages and the textual matter, British spelling has been generally followed.

This study is the outgrowth of a task undertaken in a seminar at Columbia University, conducted by Prof. Carlton J. H. Hayes. Subsequent research, necessarily largely carried on in Ireland, has been done under the direction of Professor Hayes. The writer cannot express too highly his appreciation of the sympathetic interest and active assist-

ance, which it has become a commonplace among Professor Hayes' students to expect from him and which are making him the inspirer and director of an evergrowing group of research students.

Nor would this preface be complete without some reference to a few of those many others who have helped the writer to prepare for research work. The writer wishes particularly to mention Herr Friedrich Wehse, of the Prospect Heights School, whose excellent training in the use of Latin, French, and German opened doors very necessary to a student of history; Prof F. Goodrich, of Williams College, whose thoroughgoing introduction to the field of European history was accomplished without the aid of textbooks; Prof. T. C. Smith, also of Williams College, whose further training in the methods of historical research did much to pave the way for graduate work, the late Prof W. A. Dunning, of Columbia University, whose cordial reception of the latest neophyte and whose conduct of his lecture course were full of encouragement and inspiration; and Prof. C. D. Hazen, of Columbia University, whose careful critical methods in seminar work are of inestimable value and whose literary style is a stimulus to emulation

In addition to this necessarily abridged roster of men with whom the writer has enjoyed academic contacts must be mentioned that array of friends, most of them in Ireland, who put their resources at his disposal. Among them are Dr. George O'Brien, not the least of whose kindnesses was to secure the writer the privilege of using the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Prof. Eamon Curtis, who introduced the writer to the Librarians of Trinity College and of Dublin Castle; Mr. Praeger, who, not content with giving the writer the run of the stacks in the National Library, Dublin, put the staff of the Library at his command, and opened to him files of newspapers not at that time accessible

to the general reader; and Prof R. M. Henry, of Queens University, whose wide knowledge of the Belfast labour movement in its diverse aspects was freely put at the writer's service.

Of the labour leaders, Mr Thomas Johnson supplied the writer with much documentary and other material, which officials of the Transport and other unions considerably supplemented. In particular, Mr. William O'Brien very generously put at the writer's disposal his extremely valuable collection of pamphlets, leaflets, manifestos, minute-books, newspaper clippings, etc. Mr. C. J. Kenny likewise put in his hands a mass of information on workers' education and the Connolly Labour College.

Aside from the representatives of official labour, the writer makes grateful acknowledgment of the courtesy and assistance of Mrs. P. Colgan (Delia Larkin) and her circle of intimates, of Mr James Larkin himself and of other members of his family, of Miss B. Green, and of Roderic and Nora Connolly, children of the late James Connolly.

In Belfast the writer received much assistance from various members of "The College", from Mr. H. Midgley, Secretary of the Labour Party (Northern Ireland), and from his associates, and from Mr. W. Grant, Vice-Chairman of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association.

It would be impossible to make individual acknowledgment of the services of other leaders and of the numerous members of the rank and file who supplied much documentary evidence and suggested many fruitful lines of investigation; it is not the less warm for not being individual.

Space forbids enumeration of the political leaders, including such diverse personalities as Mme. Constance Markievicz and Mr Desmond Fitzgerald, who communicated much valuable information about their experiences and points of view. One figure who looms large above all con-

siderations of party is Mr G W. Russell (*Æ*), whose cordial hospitality is one of the warmest recollections of the student who visits Dublin.

For the rest, the writer wishes to testify to his appreciation of the aid of Mr. Nicholas S Kaltchas, of the University of Michigan, who read this book in manuscript and offered a number of most helpful suggestions; of Mary R. M. Griffiths, who has rendered invaluable assistance throughout; and of his father, Mr. Wm. K. Clarkson, whose consistent interest has very much facilitated the writer's work





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTORY	
"The Irish Question" . . . . .	17
Scope of the present study . . . . .	21
Industrial backwardness of Ireland . . . . .	22
The "difference" thesis . . . . .	24
Labour and the Church . . . . .	29
CHAPTER II	
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LEGISLATION	
Acts of 1729 and 1743 . . . . .	33
Causes of labour troubles . . . . .	36
Repressive measures . . . . .	38
Origin of the Act of 1780 . . . . .	47
Repression at its zenith . . . . .	50
Legislation of "Grattan's Parliament" . . . . .	52
"Union" legislation . . . . .	55
CHAPTER III	
EARLY IRISH TRADE UNIONISM: OBJECTS AND METHODS	
Industrial condition of Ireland . . . . .	58
Limitation of apprentices . . . . .	61
Fixation of a minimum wage . . . . .	72
Employment of union men . . . . .	76
Absence of sectarian issues . . . . .	90
Other objects of combinations . . . . .	94
Summary . . . . .	98
CHAPTER IV	
EARLY IRISH TRADE UNIONISM: ORGANISATION AND CHARACTER	
Internal organisation . . . . .	99
Scope of activities . . . . .	100
Rules governing admission . . . . .	104
Connection of metropolitan and provincial unions . . . . .	108
Connection of Irish and British unions . . . . .	111
Inter-trade connections . . . . .	115
Condition of the working class . . . . .	119

## ✓ CHAPTER V

PAGE

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATIONALISM

Introductory . . . . .	126
The United Irishmen . . . . .	127
Daniel O'Connell . . . . .	130
His attitude toward the trade unions . . . . .	137
Chartism . . . . .	145
Young Ireland . . . . .	146
The Fenians . . . . .	159
✓ The Home Rulers . . . . .	162
Summary . . . . .	162

## CHAPTER VI

## LABOUR IN THE BACKWASH

Introductory . . . . .	164
Progress in organisation . . . . .	164
The United Trades' Association . . . . .	166
Its methods and aims . . . . .	172
The British Trades Union Congress abroad . . . . .	176
The British Trades Union Congress at home . . . . .	181
Growing discontent of Irish trade unionists . . . . .	184
Founding of the Irish Congress . . . . .	186

## CHAPTER VII

## THE "OLD UNIONISM"

Early days of the Irish Congress . . . . .	190
Its social philosophy . . . . .	196
Sects and politics . . . . .	202
Early Irish Socialism . . . . .	207
Summary . . . . .	214

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE "NEW UNIONISM"

The Belfast strikes of 1907 . . . . .	215
The Dublin carters' strike: the I. T. W. U. . . . .	220
"Rebel Cork" . . . . .	223
Congress and "Larkinism" . . . . .	227
Connolly's philosophy . . . . .	232
The Irish rail strike . . . . .	235
The Wexford strike . . . . .	240
"Disturbed Dublin"—1913 . . . . .	242
Triumph of "Larkinism" . . . . .	247

## CHAPTER IX

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY NATIONALISM

Labour and the political parties . . . . .	250
The "Nationalists" and Labour . . . . .	253
<i>The United Irishman</i> . . . . .	256
<i>Sinn Féin</i> . . . . .	264
<i>Sinn Féin</i> and "Larkinism" . . . . .	267
<i>Sinn Féin</i> and 1913 . . . . .	276
<i>Irish Freedom</i> . . . . .	281
Labour and nationalism . . . . .	287

## CHAPTER X

## LABOUR AT ITS APOGEE

Congress and politics . . . . .	289
Formation of the Irish Labour Party . . . . .	293
Home Rule and Partition . . . . .	297
Irish Labour and the War . . . . .	300
The Irish Citizen Army. . . . .	302
Industrial activity . . . . .	304
The College Green election . . . . .	306
Opposition to recruiting . . . . .	307
Easter Week . . . . .	309

## CHAPTER XI

## FROM THE RISING TO THE TREATY

The aftermath of Easter Week . . . . .	313
Progress in organisation . . . . .	320
Clarification of theory . . . . .	324
The Irish Labour Party and the Great War . . . . .	329
The Irish Labour Party and Irish nationhood . . . . .	335
The Irish Labour Party and the Terror . . . . .	339
The Irish Labour Party and the Peace . . . . .	342

## CHAPTER XII

## BELFAST

Religion and politics . . . . .	344
The labour movement . . . . .	347
Socialism and politics . . . . .	349
Belfast's pride . . . . .	353
The linen industry . . . . .	354
Enforcement of labour legislation . . . . .	359

	PAGE
Sectarianism . . . . .	361
The "pogrom" of 1920 . . . . .	364
The Ulster Unionist Labour Association . . . . .	373
The Belfast Labour Party . . . . .	375
The Labour Party (Northern Ireland) . . . . .	378
Workers' education . . . . .	380
Unemployment . . . . .	382
"What the Northern Government is doing for Labour" . . . . .	383
Conclusion . . . . .	386

## CHAPTER XIII

## BRITISH LABOUR AND IRISH

Introductory . . . . .	388
The Trades Union Congress and Ireland . . . . .	389
The Amalgamateds and Ireland . . . . .	394
The I. L. P. and Ireland . . . . .	397
The Labour Party and Ireland . . . . .	398
British Labour and "Larkinism" . . . . .	402
Attempts at rapprochement . . . . .	405
War-time relations . . . . .	409
The Irish munitions strike . . . . .	414
The Belfast "pogrom" . . . . .	424
British Labour and the peace . . . . .	432

## CHAPTER XIV

## LABOUR AND THE FREE STATE

Revolution? . . . . .	435
Unemployment . . . . .	441
Cost of living . . . . .	442
Housing . . . . .	442
Manifestos and deputations . . . . .	445
The political situation . . . . .	448
<i>Poblacht na h-Eireann</i> . . . . .	451
<i>The Free State</i> . . . . .	452
Labour and the elections . . . . .	455
Parliamentary democracy . . . . .	460
Larkin and Labour . . . . .	463
The Free State and Labour . . . . .	468
The Republicans and Labour . . . . .	472
Summary . . . . .	473
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	479
INDEX . . . . .	493

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

EMULATING Julius Caesar's classic treatment of ancient Gaul, those who write our text-books of modern European history tell us that the whole of the Irish question is divided into three parts. In their conventionalised treatment of the problem—a device necessitated by the unwillingness or inability of their readers to assimilate any but predigested and tabloid information—the Irish question has had: (1) a religious aspect; (2) an agrarian aspect; and (3) a political aspect. These three aspects may be briefly recapitulated.

The religious difficulty, we are told, arose from the fact that Ireland, the great bulk of whose population are Catholics, has been ruled by a Protestant government. The first great step in remedy of this grievance was the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, closely followed by Catholic Emancipation in 1829. There still remained the difficulty that the established Church of Ireland was a Protestant institution and that it was nevertheless empowered to collect tithes from Catholics and Dissenters as well as from its own members. To propitiate O'Connell, who had placed himself at the head of the embattled peasantry, the Tithe Commutation Act was passed in 1838; although the landlords by increasing the rent still compelled the tenants virtually to pay the tithe, the gesture was not without effect; this item had been shifted from the religious to the agrarian account. Finally, the disestablishment and partial disendowment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 is usually regarded as having finally disposed of the ecclesiastical aspect

of the Irish question — regardless of the futility of such measures in removing the fundamental fact of the Protestant Ascendancy.

So intimately bound up with the ecclesiastical question as to be inseparable from it has been the education question. Ireland had two institutions of higher education—Maynooth for its priests and Trinity College (Dublin University) for its Protestant youth. In 1845, Peel had more than doubled the Maynooth endowment by a Government grant. At the same time the “Godless colleges” were established in Belfast, Cork, and Galway. Though Disestablishment put an end also to the Maynooth Grant and to the *Regium Donum*,<sup>1</sup> the Catholic and Presbyterian churches received outright a sum fourteen times as great as those annual subsidies. Still, the demand for a Catholic University empowered to grant degrees was unsatisfied. Gladstone’s Irish University Bill of 1873 was defeated; it would have satisfied no one in any case. Not until 1908 was further progress made. In that year the “Birrell Act” established the National University of Ireland, consisting of the “Godless colleges”, plus a newly-created University College, Dublin. Though officially undenominational, the three colleges in Dublin, Cork, and Galway are virtually Catholic, while Queen’s College, Belfast, is Protestant.

Far more pressing than the religious aspect has been the agrarian phase of the Irish question. The agrarian problem had its roots in the repeated confiscation and reallotment of the land; by this historic process it had come to pass that the ownership of the soil of Ireland was vested in an un-Irish few who, upon the Union, removed their residence to England. The land was let and sublet in such fashion as to create at the bottom of the scale a rack-rented peasantry, raising grain to pay the rent and subsisting on a meagre

<sup>1</sup> The state grant to the Presbyterians.

diet of potatoes. The situation had been infinitely worsened by the English policy of extirpating Ireland's competitive industries, leaving to Ireland's surplus population as the only alternatives to starvation, submission to the rack-rents or emigration. In such circumstances, the Irish peasantry fell an easy prey to famine and famine-fever whenever the potato crop failed, however bountiful the grain crop might be; the famine of '46 and Black '47 is but the best known of a long series. The not unnatural result of such conditions was the perpetual crop of "Irish disturbances", in remedy of which Coercion Acts were unavailing. Tithe commutation had brought no relief; the insurrection of '48 had failed owing to utterly incompetent and hesitating leadership; the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 had had an effect the reverse of the Government's intention. It was difficult for English statesmen to overcome their repugnance to any interference with the working of "economic laws"; inability to overcome that repugnance had resulted in the abortion of Gladstone's Irish Land Act of 1870. Only the operations of the Land League could get Mr. Gladstone and his associates over their difficulty; in 1881 the second Irish Land Act adopted the principle of the "three F's", though "fair rent" turned out to be "judicial rent". Subsequently the Government essayed a more drastic remedy, though one less at variance with economic orthodoxy. The principle of state assistance in the conversion of the Irish tenantry into a peasant proprietary, advanced by Gladstone in 1886, was adopted on a small scale by the Unionist ministry in 1891. The principle was later widely extended, particularly by the Land Purchase Act of 1903. Thus, we are told, the agrarian aspect of the Irish problem was set fairly on the way to ultimate solution; an arrangement had been arrived at satisfactory to both the landlords and the farmers—but the problem of the agricultural labourer had

barely been scratched by the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act of 1907. Sir Horace Plunkett's life-work, the organisation of agricultural cooperation, has further benefited the farmer, but left the labourer's problem as acute as ever.

The remaining aspect of the conventionalised Irish question, the political aspect, has been the outcome of Irish nationalism, fostered by England's delay in seeking solution for the religious and agrarian difficulties. Centuries of subjection could not suffice to erase the memory of conquest—a conquest accomplished, not in the cosmopolitan days of feudalism, but by a people coming as aliens—"aliens in blood, in religion, and in language". The confiscation of the land, the destruction of Ireland's flourishing woollen industry, the penal laws—all the circumstances attendant on the subordination of the Irish Parliament to the English—had envenomed the wounds left smarting by Elizabeth and Cromwell. The concession of legislative independence, though gravely impaired by the retention of executive authority in English hands, had been followed by a brief period of prosperity to which many Irishmen were to look back with longing. The suppression of Ireland's legislative independence, followed, as it was, by the decay of Ireland's renascent trade and industry, had given added scope for the play of Irish national sentiment. The remnant of the United Irishmen, the Repeal Association, Young Ireland, and the Fenians—each of these movements in turn had brought Irish resentment to a head. The brief flare of Emmet's flame, the grand gestures of O'Connell, the tragedy of '48, and the melodrama of the '60's had contributed, each in its own way, to the fashioning of that shimmering tissue of tradition and legend, of fact and fancy, that constitutes the glorious heritage of the modern Gael. Through the leadership of Isaac Butt the Irish members at Westminster were redeemed from the stigma of the



“Pope’s Brass Band” and became again, as in the days of “King Dan and his tail”, a medium for the airing of Ireland’s woes. The supersession of Butt by Parnell paved the way for the policy of sabotage in Parliament that drove Gladstone to his desperate adoption of the Home Rule policy. In the hands of the Unionists kindness proved a bad executioner; the Local Government Act of 1898 only created new organs for the voicing of Ireland’s national demand. So completely did the Home Rule agitation eclipse all other manifestations of political discontent that it was confidently expected, on the eve of the war, that the concession of Home Rule would complete the solution of the Irish question.

As the manuals referred to were, for the most part, compiled before the war, the metamorphosis of the Irish national demand is not to be traced in their pages. In view of the tendency of such works to accept the *fait accompli*, it is, however, a fair inference that the new crop of post-war text-books will—barring accidents to the Irish powder-barrel—bear testimony to the happy solution of the Irish question effected by the Articles of Agreement signed on December 6, 1921, and by the consummation of Ireland’s nationhood under the guise of “Saorstát Eireann”.

Such an outline of the Irish question bears little more relation to the facts of Irish history than does a Corinthian capital to the acanthus plant. The Irish Upas tree of Mr. Gladstone’s simile consists not alone of those spreading branches beneath whose fatal shade so many English ministries have met their doom. English power in Ireland is no mushroom growth; deep into the heart of Irish life the Upas tree has struck its roots. Branch after branch may be lopped off, but the vast trunk still stands unshaken, drawing its poisonous sap from far-ramifying roots in Ireland’s

social system Without the destruction of those economic roots, the freedom of Ireland remains a fiction. In the inclusion of Ireland in the economic system of England is implicit the inclusion of Ireland in the political system of England. Herein lies the failure of such accounts of the Irish question.

The fault lies, not with the individual writers of textbooks, but in the fact that such manuals are precluded by their very function from attempting more than a sketch of those questions that have engaged the attention of the accredited political authorities. But a faithful delineation of battles waged in the open arena of politics is at best but a motion-picture reproduction of the drama staged in the daily lives of the people. It is, then, the thesis of the present study that the national aspirations of Ireland have derived their motive power from the driving force of social oppression. Yet the scope of this work is a modest one; this book will attempt no complete explanation of the Irish question; it is intended only as a partial contribution to that end.

Specifically, the subject for analysis is the urban labour movement, both in its evolution as a part of the general Western European movement, and in its relation to Irish nationalism. The agrarian problem, except in so far as the problems of the agricultural labourer have overlapped the problems of the urban proletariat, lies wholly without the scope of this development.

Such treatment of Ireland may demand explanation. Ireland is a predominantly agricultural country, though Belfast is renowned for its linen-mills and ship-yards, and Dublin for its breweries and distilleries, its biscuits and its lion-cubs, Ireland is not, generally speaking, an industrial country. The reasons for Ireland's industrial backwardness belong to the field of economic history. This is not the place to venture on such controversial matters.<sup>1</sup>

It should, however, be pointed out that Ireland has not always been so predominantly an agricultural country with a rusticated population. At the time of the Union, Dublin was the second city in the British Isles. Though Belfast was but an infant, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford were important urban communities. The legislation of the Irish Parliament in the eighteenth century bears witness to the importance of the skilled craftsmen of these and other towns. In the nineteenth century, to be sure, Irish trade and industry fell into decay. "The Union struck a heavy blow to trade", was O'Connell's *obiter dictum*; and whether the Lord High Executioner of Irish prosperity was Pitt or Wellington or Watt, it is certain that the emigration of the Dublin gentlefolk opened many a stately mansion to the invasion of the proletariat — of the artisans whose skill now went unremunerated, and of the constant influx of the surplus from the countryside, ever threatening to engulf the unskilled denizens of the slums, and now swollen by the breakdown of the domestic system. For Ireland's failure to recover her lost industrial prosperity various publicists have advanced a medley of contradictory reasons. Thus, on the one hand, it is urged that the short-sighted selfishness of Irish workers has repeatedly been the ruination of industrial enterprise in Ireland; on the other hand, it is replied that the lack of initiative and the fatuous greed of Irish capitalists have caused the stagnation. Out of the welter rings one persistent note: Ireland has no coal deposits. Irrespective of the truth or falsity of this assumption, the example of Belfast gives the lie to such facile logic: "At the present time Northern Ireland imports each year about 2,000,000 tons of coal, while the cost of the amount imported annually into Belfast for the purpose of commercial enterprise is over £2,000,000"<sup>1</sup> Even though "in the past every ton of coal

<sup>1</sup> Right Hon J M Andrews, Minister of Labour (Northern Ireland).

and every bar of iron used in Ulster has been brought from Great Britain", yet "Belfast has been more fortunate than most shipbuilding centres. While work was scarce on the Clyde and elsewhere in Great Britain it was fairly brisk in the yards of Harland and Wolff." In view of facts such as these, and bearing in mind that "less than a century ago Belfast was a rather insignificant port and . . . the great harbour of to-day, which can berth the largest ships, has been virtually scraped out of the mud",<sup>1</sup> the industrial backwardness of the rest of Ireland becomes an enigma.

In explication of this enigma, it has become customary to fall back on the hypothesis that the Irish labour movement is, and has always been, a movement radically different from that in Great Britain. It has been asserted, for a variety of reasons, that from their earliest stages the two movements have differed.

In one quarter an attempt has been made to seek in eighteenth-century legislation a firm foundation for this theory. "In the English statutes," write S. and B. Webb in their *History of Trade Unionism*, "this prohibition of combination was, as we have seen, only a secondary feature, incidental to the main purpose of the law. The case is different with regard to the early Irish Acts, the terms of which point to a much sharper cleavage between masters and men, due, perhaps, to difference of religion and race." This hypothesis rests on the following assertions: "The very first statute against combinations which was passed by the Irish Parliament, the Act of 1729 (3 Geo. II, c. 14), contained no provisions protecting the wage-earner, and prohibited combinations in all trades whatsoever. The Act

"Industrial Future of Northern Ireland", in *The Times Imperial and Foreign Trade and Engineering Supplement, Ulster Industries Section*, Aug. 9, 1924.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert Lynn, M. P., editor of the Belfast *Northern Whig*, "Ulster To-day", in *Times Trade and Engineering Supplement*, *op cit.*

of 1743 (17 Geo. II, c. 8), called forth by the failure of the previous prohibition, equally confined itself to drastic penal measures, including the punishment of the keepers of the public-houses which were used for meetings. But in later years the English practice seems to have been followed; for the laws of 1758 (31 Geo. II, c. 17), 1763 (3 Geo. III, c. 34, sec. 23), 1771 (11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 18, sec. 40, and c. 33), and 1779 (19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 24, and c. 36), provide for the fixing of wages and contain other regulations of industry, amongst which the prohibition of combinations comes as a matter of course.”<sup>1</sup>

Whether or no the facts as stated support the conclusion, the Irish Statutes are not accurately cited. The Act of 1729 was designed, not only to suppress combinations of workers, but also to secure the better payment of wages. This Act and the Act of 1743, as well as several other statutes of the period (e g, 2 Geo I, c. 17) do contain provision for the protection of the wage-earner, viz, provision for the easier recovery of wages, exemption from penalties for non-performance of their contract if the employer was at fault, and prohibition of the trucking system. Wages are not fixed, and there is no provision for their fixing, in the laws of 1759 (31 Geo. II, c. 17), 1763 (3 Geo III, c. 34), and 1780 (19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 19). Where provision is made for the fixing of wages (11 & 12 Geo III, c. 18 and c. 33, and 19 & 20 Geo III, c. 24 and 36), it is in no sense a protection of the wage-earner; on the contrary, maximum rates are established under heavy penalties, in response to petitions from the masters. In the Acts of 1759 (31 Geo. II, c 17) and 1780 (19 & 20 Geo III, c. 19) the anti-combination provisions, far from being “incidental to the main purpose of the law”, are the only “regulations of industry” made for the trades affected.

<sup>1</sup> S. & B Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1920 ed.), pp. 68-9

This "difference" thesis, so authoritatively advanced, finds corroboration from Irish historians, though on other grounds. In a chapter on "Combinations of Labourers", which has crept into George O'Brien's thoughtful *Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, it is stated that: "The Irish workers seem, however, to have made use of combinations to a somewhat unusual extent, and to have sought their own interests with a complete disregard of the peculiar difficulties under which Irish manufacture was carried on."<sup>1</sup> The evidence brought together in support of this statement will not bear critical examination. Statements of employers, observations of travellers, fulminations of judges, prize essays, and anonymous pamphlets are hardly the type of evidence on which to base generalisations about the activities of labour organisations; while certain inaccuracies in the references to the Irish Statutes and Irish Commons Journal invalidate the evidence from these sources.

To those who for every Irish movement seek roots in Ireland's Gaelic past, such an hypothesis is peculiarly welcome. Repudiating any implication of inferiority arising out of the fact of difference, leading champions of Irish labour<sup>2</sup> yet see in the Irish labour movement an isolated struggle for the reestablishment of the ancient Gaelic social order, rather than merely a part of the general struggle conducted by the working classes throughout Western Europe against the evils of industrial capitalism.

In view of the shoddy treatment that Irish labour in the

<sup>1</sup> Geo. O'Brien, *Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin and London, 1918), ch. v. In justice, it should be stated here that Mr O'Brien has radically revised his treatment of this topic in *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (London, 1921).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin, 1910); W. P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement from the 'twenties to our own day* (Dublin, 1919).

eighteenth century has received at the hands of historians of well-established reputation, it has been thought desirable to include in the present study a chapter on the nature of eighteenth-century combination as reflected in the Irish Statutes and the Irish Commons Journal. At the risk of wearying the reader with technical jargon, but with the aim of enabling the student to form his own conclusions, the language of these original sources has been faithfully followed.

More familiar is the history of trade unionism in the nineteenth century. Repeatedly, combinations of workmen were made the object of Parliamentary investigations. After the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824-25, trade unions ceased to be oath-bound secret societies and emerged into the light of publicity. Books and pamphlets about them multiplied; even newspaper readers became aware of their existence and activities. Yet even here the hypothesis of difference has been maintained. Though George O'Brien in his *Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* has corrected his earlier account of combinations, he has remained a voice crying in the wilderness. For those who, following O'Connell's example, would fain see the revival of industrial prosperity in Ireland, whatever the cost to the toiling masses of that unhappy land, the hypothesis provides a well-stocked armoury. By a curious freak of scholarship, this hypothesis has been ingenuously adopted by those renowned investigators to whom the history of trade unionism owes so much. "The Dublin trades," write S. and B. Webb, "then [1824] the best organised in the Kingdom, ruthlessly enforced their bye-laws for the regulation of their respective industries, and formed a joint committee, the so-called 'Board of Green Cloth', whose dictates became the terror of the employers."<sup>1</sup> Of 1838

<sup>1</sup> S. & B. Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

they write: "At this time the trade societies of Dublin and Cork had caused serious complaint by attempting to establish, and not without violence, an effective monopoly in certain skilled industries. . . O'Connell got the opportunity he desired of demonstrating, through selected witnesses, the violent and exclusive spirit which animated the Irish Unions".<sup>1</sup> Such a flagrant offence against the dogma of Accuracy demands explanation; to borrow the Webbs' own comment on Nassau Senior's report to Lord Melbourne: "This passage throws light both on the state of mind and on the practical judgment of the trusted [historian] The two [scholars] appear to have made no inquiries among workmen, and to have accepted implicitly every statement, including hearsay gossip, offered by employers. The evidence thus collected naturally led to a very unfavourable conclusion." <sup>2</sup>

With such authoritarian support to fall back on, another Webb was emboldened, in the year of the great Dublin dispute, to qualify for a prize offered by the Royal Dublin Society, promoters of the world-famous Horse Show. By a judiciously eclectic use of various Parliamentary Papers, Mr. J. J. Webb was able to produce, in *Industrial Dublin since 1698*,<sup>3</sup> apparently convincing proof of the pernicious effects of combination on the part of Dublin artisans. Following in his wake, a Mr. E. J. Riordan, in *Modern Irish Trade and Industry*,<sup>4</sup> has given increased currency to the notion that although trade unionism in Great Britain has not prevented that country from becoming the foremost industrial nation in the world, Irish trade unionism has wrought devastation wherever it has not been put down.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 171-173.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139. The words "historian" and "scholars" are substitutions for "economist" and "commissioners", respectively

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Webb, *Industrial Dublin since 1698 and the Silk Industry in Dublin* (Dublin and London, 1913).

<sup>4</sup> E. J. Riordan, *Modern Irish Trade and Industry* (London, 1920).



The fact that the fallacious hypothesis of difference has attained such wide acceptance—the fact that virtually every writer on the subject, from a man on the road to Cabinet office to the man who uses other men's findings to write newspaper articles with an "object"—has made it seem advisable to give somewhat disproportionate attention to this phase of the Irish labour movement; two chapters have accordingly been devoted to an analysis of the evidence on which the writers referred to above claim to base their conclusions

The remaining chapters are devoted to the description of the stages of organisation and philosophy passed through by the modern Irish labour movement, and to the effort to estimate the position of labour in the Irish nation, as conceived by Nationalists of various schools on the one hand, and as conceived by the leaders of the labour movement itself on the other. Chapters have been included to deal with the special conditions labour has had to face in the Belfast area and with the relations between the Irish and British labour movements.

For a variety of reasons no special treatment of the relations between labour and the Church<sup>1</sup> has been included. In the first place, the Church officially is part neither of the labour movement nor of the national movement, though exerting a retarding influence on both. Furthermore, though the attitude of the Church toward labour organisations and labour questions has been officially defined, individual priests and prelates have in practice taken sides both for and against labour in its struggles. The best statement of the Church's position on Irish social questions is perhaps to be found in the twenty-eight numbers of the "Social Action Series",<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The reference is, of course, to the Roman Catholic Church. To consider any of the other churches in this connection would be a little absurd.

<sup>2</sup> "*Irish Messenger*" Books. *Social Action Series* (Dublin, 1914-24).

published by the *Irish Messenger* with the *imprimatur* of the Catholic Primate of Ireland.

As an instance, however, of the broad gulf yawning betwixt theory and practice, even in so well-organised and venerable an institution as the Church, certain passages in these pamphlets may be compared with the incidents of 1913. One of these pamphlets excerpts from the mortality returns for 1912 figures showing that the ratio of deaths of children under one year to the total deaths in Dublin ranged from 0.085 in the wealthier districts to 0.220 in the slums, the average being 0.197. "In only a few of the English urban areas is there any approach to the Dublin rate." According to Sir Charles Cameron, for thirty-five years Medical Superintendent Officer of Health in Dublin, the writer continues, "The comparatively high death-rate of Dublin is due to the larger number of the very poor who reside in it. In an earlier Report (1909) he writes: 'The high death-rate of infants and young children is practically confined to the lower classes. . . . The 'middle class' are about as numerous as the labourers, hawkers, porters, etc. In 1909, 227 children of the middle class and under five years of age passed away; whilst 1,317 children belonging to the labouring class passed away. . . . The chief causes of the high death-roll amongst the children of the poor are improper food, insufficient nourishment, deficient clothing, etc.'"<sup>1</sup> Small wonder is it that Ireland's most ardent advocate of social action by the organised power of the Church exclaims: "Oh! how God must hardly hold His hand to strike our society, when He beholds the cold, filthy hovels where thousands of His little ones work wearily, monotonously, from morn till eve, day in and day out, year in and year out, clinging desperately to life, poor little plants forced to bear fruit in what should be their season of

<sup>1</sup> No 13, *Poverty in Dublin*, pp 12-13.

flowers.”<sup>1</sup> Yet when in the stormy autumn of 1913 Mrs. Montefiore and her associates organised the project of taking to England, pending a settlement of the desperate industrial dispute, a number of the poorest children—to be cared for in the homes of Catholics—the *Irish Independent*, owned by the chairman of the Dublin Employers’ Federation, Ltd., had the satisfaction of announcing that: “Thanks to the spirited action of the clergy, acting on the instructions of the Most Reverend Dr. Walsh—and supported by the laity—the attempted deportation of children was completely foiled during the day.”<sup>2</sup> This “spirited”—some say “spiritous”—action of the clergy is difficult to reconcile with the Lenten Lectures of scholarly Jesuits published by the *Irish Messenger*. The type of priest who took this “timely action” is out of harmony with the type of priest so delightfully portrayed by W. P. Ryan in *The Pope’s Green Island*.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, labour itself has increasingly tended to disregard clerical admonitions. In Connolly’s view, “the laity are a part of the Church and . . . therefore the right of rebellion against injustice so freely claimed by the Papacy and the Hierarchy is also the inalienable right of the laity”. He concludes a list of instances in which disregard of ecclesiastical precept has been endorsed as right by the verdict of history, as follows:

Insofar as true religion has triumphed in the hearts of men it has triumphed in spite of, not because of, the political activities of the priesthood. That political activity in the past, like the clerical opposition to Socialism at present, was and is an attempt

<sup>1</sup> No. 4, *The Church and the Working Child*, by Rev. L. McKenna, S. J., M. A., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Independent*, Oct. 23, 1913. Archbishop Walsh’s letter was published in the issue of Oct. 21.

<sup>3</sup> W. P. Ryan, *The Pope’s Green Island* (Dublin, 1912).

to serve God and Mammon—an attempt to combine the service of Him who in his humbleness rode upon an ass, with the service of those who rode roughshod over the hearts and souls and hopes of suffering humanity.<sup>1</sup>

As this was written by a man who, according to Reverend Father McKenna, S.J., “was in sincere communion with the Church when he died”,<sup>2</sup> the impossibility of isolating the germ of that Church becomes apparent. Yet unless that germ be isolated there can be no scientific discussion of its influence on the labour movement. Individual clergymen, like individual laymen, have, as already stated, exerted their influence, some for, some against labour. The most that can be said is that the Hierarchy has, in every instance, constituted a conservative force, lending its moral weight, such as it is, to any resistance to change—cultural, political, social, economic, or religious.

On the other hand, the nationalist movement, aiming by its very nature at political change, has from time to time linked itself with movements striving for change in other directions. So it has come to pass that the nationalist elements, on whose necks, first the Catholics, then the farmers had ridden to victory, have at last themselves been carried, if not to triumph, at least within an ace of triumph, by the rising tide of the revolutionary labour movement.

<sup>1</sup> James Connolly, *Labor, Nationality and Religion* (New York, 1918), “Foreword”.

<sup>2</sup> *The Social Teachings of James Connolly* (Dublin, 1920), p. 11.

## CHAPTER II

### EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LEGISLATION

THE hypotheses of "difference" outlined in the introduction can best be evaluated in the light of the fragmentary narrative history of Irish trade unionism in the eighteenth century that can be pieced together from authentic available sources. It will be borne in mind that the Irish Parliament in the eighteenth century was an assembly of landlords, dominated by the then universally current mercantilist principles. In conformity with these principles, its legislation aimed to regulate all phases of the economic activity of the Kingdom, among other things, it was deemed necessary to prevent any and all combinations which might encroach upon the government's sole authority to regulate such matters

Combinations of workmen, artificers, and others had been illegal under Irish law, as under English, since the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> When, however, early in the eighteenth century journeymen's associations became serious thorns in the masters' sides, recourse was had, in Ireland as in England, not to the courts, but to the respective Parliaments. In 1729, aware of certain irregularities in the payment of wages and in other matters, confronted by the necessity of determining the dimensions of bricks, and learning that "unlawful clubs and societies" had "presumed contrary to the law to enter into combinations, and to make by-laws and orders, by which they pretend to regulate the trade and the prices of

<sup>1</sup> 2 & 3 Ed. VI, c. 15.

goods, and to advance their wages unreasonably, and many other things to the like purpose", the Irish Parliament passed "An act to prevent unlawful combinations of workmen, artificers, and labourers employed in the several trades and manufactures of this kingdom, and for the better payment of their wages: as also to prevent abuses in making of bricks, and to ascertain their dimensions".<sup>1</sup>

This Act is in entire conformity with the mercantilist principles, which dominate all the Irish legislation of this period. The clause prohibiting combinations of workers was intended to prevent any interference with Parliament's exclusive authority to make provision for the welfare of the kingdom and of its inhabitants. If the workers had grievances to be redressed, the landlords who composed Parliament were prepared to hear their case and, if they deemed it necessary, to make legislative provision for their protection. Combinations of workers for the purpose of securing such legislative relief were not objectionable; but any and all combinations "for regulating the said trade or mystery, or for regulating or settling the prices of goods, or for advancing their wages, or for lessening their usual hours of work"—in brief, combinations which trespassed on the government's sphere of action—were explicitly prohibited. Any person who persisted in having any sort of connection with such associations was to be punished by three months' hard labour. Other clauses, coordinate with this anti-combination clause, made provision for the protection of the workers against injustice on the part of employers. The penalty imposed on the workers for quitting their service before their time had expired, for absenting themselves from their work for more than three days, or for returning their work unfinished, was to be remitted if the delinquency arose from the employer's failure to provide materials or to pay

<sup>1</sup> 3 Geo II, c. 14.

wages. Another clause provides that the employer must pay the full wages in money only and must make no deduction (as, for example, to pay the ale-house or tavern score), at least, not without the employee's consent, and provides for the judicial recovery of unpaid wages.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1715, this tendency on the part of Irish employers of labour to refrain from the payment of wages had evoked a special statute (2 Geo. I, c 17), designed to facilitate the recovery of unpaid wages.<sup>2</sup>

The Act of 1729 speedily proved ineffectual, and was "notoriously eluded". "Several clubs and societies formed by apprentices and servants" pretended and took upon themselves to frame articles, rules, orders, and by-laws "not only for the regulation of apprentices and servants", but also "for the support and maintenance of idle and disorderly servants, and such who have been discharged by their masters or mistresses, and are not in service, and collect contributions and levy sums of money on the members of such clubs or societies, and inflict punishments on such, who do not obey the rules of such clubs or societies; by which means great disorders and riots do and may frequently happen not only to the prejudice of the trade and manufactures, but to the great disturbance of the peace of the kingdom." To remedy this sorry state of affairs, it was enacted in 1743 that assemblies of three or more persons, not legally incorporated, meeting for the purpose of making by-laws, etc, respecting journeymen, apprentices, or servants, were unlawful; that the collection of funds for their support when unemployed, or for their use on any

<sup>1</sup> On complaint for non-payment of wages (in sums not above 3 l.) two justices might summon the offender, if not a peer, and issue a warrant to distrain, otherwise recourse must be had to civil bill

<sup>2</sup> A similar proposal had been rejected in 1707. Cf. *Irish Commons Journal* (hereinafter cited as I. C J) vol. ii, p 495. For full title *vide* Bibliography

pretence, was an unlawful practice, that the houses used for meetings were public nuisances; that the owners, on conviction, "shall be punished as those, who keep common bawdy houses, are by law punishable"; and that all persons entering into such unlawful contracts respecting journeymen, etc., or collecting for members of such clubs, were to be punished, on conviction before two justices, as provided by the Act of 1729. By the same statute of 1743 it was reenacted that employers must pay the full wages in ready money; employers convicted of paying in any other manner were to suffer a penalty of 10 *l*.<sup>1</sup>

The Act of 1743 likewise proved ineffectual; the dissatisfaction of the workers continued to trouble the peace of the kingdom. In 1749 the Irish House of Commons received the report of "the Committee appointed to enquire into the Causes of the Disputes and Dissensions between Masters and Journeymen of several Trades in this Kingdom, and to find out the most proper and likely Means to prevent them for the future".<sup>2</sup> On behalf of the Committee, Sir Richard Cox presented a set of resolutions, setting forth the causes of such dissensions, and suggesting the remedy thereof. The causes assigned are: (1) "the uncertain Rates of Wages to Artificers, &c."; <sup>3</sup> (2) "the

<sup>1</sup> 17 Geo. II, c 8

<sup>2</sup> *I C. J. V* 58-59

<sup>3</sup> As in the case of the anti-combination provisions, Irish law already provided for the fixing of legal rates of wages. The Statute of Labourers (23 Ed III) (1349) had been transmitted from England for observance in Ireland. Wages had been specifically fixed for a number of trades by a Statute of Artificers of 1388 (12 Richard II), likewise transmitted from England for observance in Ireland. An Irish Act of 1542 (33 Henry VIII, c 9), made perpetual in 1569 (11 Eliz., c. 5, Sess. 1), empowered justices of the peace yearly, at Easter and Michaelmas sessions, to fix at their discretion maximum rates of wages, and enacted that non-observance should be punished by imprisonment; any prior act "concerning the limitation of wages" was declared void on that point only.



heavy Taxes imposed on Journeymen by some Corporations"; (3) "unreasonable Deductions by Masters for Use of Impliments"; and (4) the "Difficulty and Neglect of executing Act to prevent unlawful Combinations of Workmen, &c. and another Act for continuing several Statutes". "For Remedy whereof", it was recommended (1) that power be vested in Justices of the Peace to settle the Wages of Artificers yearly at Quarter Sessions, &c.; (2) that for further Remedy, Protestant Journeymen employed in any of the Trades or Manufactures of the kingdom, who had served an apprenticeship of seven years, be exempt from paying taxes imposed by corporations, &c.; and (3) that to remedy more effectually the said evils, it was necessary to provide a law to explain and amend the before mentioned Acts. The resolutions were agreed to, but no legislation immediately resulted.

In a petition presented to the Commons in 1749 on behalf of several hundred journeymen broadweavers it was again urged that the "Want of settled Prices for their Labour" caused the workers "great Discouragements and Hardships". It was further complained that the masters were accustomed to impose upon the men "servile Work" in addition to their labour at the looms; men refusing to comply were "denied Work, and suffered to idle in a starving Condition, or obliged to leave the Kingdom to seek Work in foreign Parts". Arithmetical calculations were advanced to show the tremendous loss in production resulting from this practice. The House was so far moved as to "receive a Clause to deter the said Masters from imposing the said servile Work upon the Petitioners", but not so far as to embody its opinion in statute form<sup>1</sup>

The Act of 1756 (29 Geo II, c. 12) has been cited as implying the existence of labour disputes in the mining in-

dustry<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the text of this Act indicates that to the members of the House the relations between masters and men seemed too cordial, for the combinations condemned were those entered into by masters and men to defraud the landlords through extracting more coal than the landlords had been paid for. The Act is peculiarly interesting as indicating the disturbed state of the country districts, and the methods employed by the organised peasantry against the persons and property of the governing class—the landed gentry and its satellites.

The Acts of 1729 and 1743 notwithstanding, combinations of workers seem to have increased in boldness in the second half of the century. The general prohibitions contained in those statutes having proved ineffective, prohibition of combinations, under more drastic penalties, came to be a regular feature of the statutes providing for the better regulation of specific trades and industries. Thus, an Act of 1757, providing miscellaneous regulations for a variety of industries, extended the maximum term of imprisonment for weavers and others employed in the linen manufacture from three months to six, on conviction "of swearing or being sworn into a combination to raise the prices usually paid for weaving", or in case they raised mobs, or collected or paid money for that purpose<sup>2</sup> Again, the Act of 1759

<sup>1</sup> G. O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 46. The title of this Act is: "An Act to prevent unlawful combinations of tenants, colliers, miners, and others, and the sending of threatening letters without names subscribed thereto; and the malicious destruction of carriages, and for the more effectual punishment of wicked persons, who shall maliciously set fire to houses or out-houses, or to stacks of hay, corn, straw, or turf, or to ships or boats"

<sup>2</sup> "An Act to prevent frauds in lappers and others, and to prevent abuses in the manufacture of kelp, and to prevent unlawful combinations in weavers and others" 31 Geo II, c. 17, sec. 8.

(33 Geo. II, c. 5),<sup>1</sup> designed for the amendment of earlier regulations of the flaxen and hempen manufactures, included harsh provisions against combinations of workers in those industries.<sup>2</sup> These provisions were incorporated into the Act of 1763 (3 Geo III, c 34),<sup>3</sup> which codified all earlier regulations of the linen and hempen manufactures, incidentally repealing the Act of 1759 just mentioned. This statute provides that any person summoning an artificer, weaver, &c to meet to fix the price of labour, administering an oath to that purpose, or delivering any token (except a certificate of the corporation) as a testimony of license to work, or joining in any rule as to the price of labour, or by force or otherwise attempting to hinder others from working for the price agreed upon, should, on conviction before a magistrate by oath of one witness or on confession, be sent to prison for six months and "thrice whipt". Any artificer, &c taking an oath or combining to fix the price of workmanship or not to work for particular employers, might be convicted and punished as aforesaid<sup>4</sup> No journeyman weaver was to be hired without a discharge from his last employer or from a magistrate, under penalty of 5 *l.* fine. Breaking by day or night or forcing into house or shop with intent to cut or destroy materials or tools or wilfully and maliciously cutting and destroying the same without the owner's consent was declared to be "felony without

<sup>1</sup> "An act for altering and amending the laws in relation to the flaxen and hempen manufactures, and the other manufactures therein mentioned"

<sup>2</sup> 33 Geo II, c. 5, sec 1 & 2 Though these clauses aimed to prevent combinations in the linen industry, by a blanket provision all other manufactures were included in their scope.

<sup>3</sup> "An act for the better regulation of the linen and hempen manufactures"

Sec 3 of 33 Geo II, c 5, providing a penalty of one month in prison for changing employment while work was unfinished, was not included in the Act of 1763

clergy".<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that wages were not fixed, nor was any provision made for the legal determination of wage-scales in any of the ninety-seven clauses of this Act.<sup>2</sup>

The first attempt to give effect to the remedy suggested by Sir Richard Cox's Committee in 1749 was made in an act for the regulation of the city of Cork.<sup>3</sup> After making extended provision for the valuation of property, the lighting of the streets, and other manifestations of civic virtue, the legislators turned their attention to the "several unlawful combinations . . . kept up by and amongst the workmen and artificers in the several trades and manufactures of the said city of Cork to the great detriment of the trade of the said city". A lengthy enumeration of the combinator's aims and methods, including picketing, peaceful and otherwise, and the boycott, is concluded by providing that any guilty person or persons, "upon notice or intelligence thereof being given to the mayor or any one justice of the peace for the said city" may be imprisoned not above six months, and whipped, and released only on giving recognizance not above 40 *l.*, for good behaviour for seven years. If "any artificer, &c. . . not having any other visible livelihood besides the trade, business, occupation, or calling to which he shall belong, and not being in the actual service of any master or employer, on application made to him by any master or employer in the trade or business to which such manufacturer, &c. shall belong, shall refuse or neglect

<sup>1</sup> The medieval usage by which clergymen could claim immunity from the jurisdiction of secular courts in criminal cases, had not yet been abolished, except where specific provision was made, as in this instance

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a modicum of restraint was imposed on the masters by section 22 of this Act weavers were not to employ apprentices in any other work, save for 24 days at harvest time, under penalty of 10s. for the first offence, or 20s. for a second offence, in case of a third offence the apprentice was to be discharged and his fee returned.

<sup>3</sup> 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 18.

for the space of seven days after such application to work with the person making such application at the prices hereinafter ascertained", or if such artificer refuse to work after his engagement, the same penalties apply, except that the prison term is not to exceed three months. "Whereas it has been found very difficult to detect and convict persons concerned in unlawful assemblies and combinations, by reason that such unlawful assemblies are held secretly and in private places, in the houses and presence of persons whose testimony cannot be had, as the law stands, they themselves being guilty or party in such offenses", provision was made for taking their evidence under oath, on condition that such evidence was not afterwards to be used against the informers.

Notwithstanding the care taken to ferret out and punish combinators, Parliament realised that simple repressive legislation was inadequate as a remedy for the evil. "And whereas the yearly ascertaining the wages to be paid to the several artificers in the said city of Cork will in a great measure tend to prevent unlawful combinations amongst such artificers", justices of the peace were charged with the duty of ascertaining, at Easter sessions yearly, in the presence of the recorder or his deputy, "what wages or sum of money every mason, carpenter, slater, cooper, or other artificer shall take and be paid by the day or by the certain denomination, piece or parcel of work or job, either with or without meat and drink, during the year following." If higher wages should be accepted, they were to be forfeited, one-half to the workhouse [*sic*], one-half to the prosecutor; the offending artisan was to be further punished by imprisonment for not more than three months. "Provided always that the said court of general quarter sessions of the peace shall not ascertain the wages of such artificers at a lower rate or sum, than the accustomed prices usually paid

in the said city of Cork to such artificers respectively." On the other hand, if the wages were not paid, double value was recoverable (by civil bill, if the amount exceeded forty shillings).

A far more modern note is struck in "A Petition of the Master Taylors and Staymakers of the City of Dublin", presented to the Commons on February 18, 1772.<sup>1</sup> Adopting most of the suggestions made by Sir Richard Cox's Committee, the petition sets forth "That great Numbers of Journeymen Taylors and Staymakers, in and about the said City, and others who have served Apprenticeships, or have been brought up in the Art or Mystery of a Taylor, have lately departed from their Services, without just Cause, and have entered into Combinations to advance their Wages to unreasonable Prices, and lessen their usual Hours of Work, which manifestly tends to the Prejudice of Trade, to the Encouragement of Idleness, and to the great Increase of the Poor of this Metropolis. That the Source of these Disorders principally arises from Clubs and Societies, formed and held in different Parts of the said City, where Associations are entered into, Oaths administered, and other illegal Acts committed, which if not timely prevented, may be productive of very ill Consequences. That by such Associations the Petitioners are compelled to submit to such arbitrary Regulations as the said Journeymen shall think proper to impose, insomuch that the Petitioners are obliged to pay the same Wages to the most skilful and to the most ignorant, without any regard being had to the Merit, Ingenuity, or Industry of such Journeymen. That the present uncertain Rates of Wages to be paid to Journeymen of the said Trade, as well as the Difficulty of executing some Parts, and the neglecting to execute other Parts of the several Laws heretofore passed in this Kingdom, for preventing unlawful

<sup>1</sup> I C J VIII. 483:2.

Combinations, are (among others) the Causes of the many Difficulties the Petitioners labour under." A week later the Marquis of Kildare reported from the Committee to which this petition was referred: "Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the Petitioners have fully proved the Allegations of their Petition, and that they deserve the Aid of Parliament."<sup>1</sup>

Three days later, encouraged by the sympathetic attitude of the House, the master shipwrights of Dublin presented a similar petition.<sup>2</sup> Four days later this petition also received the endorsement of the Committee.<sup>3</sup> A "Petition of several Merchants, &c. of Dublin and other Cities and Towns in Ireland, who are not free of any of the Guilds or Corporations of said Cities and Towns, to be heard by Counsel against Heads for confirming Aids and Contributions payable by Freemen and Non-Freemen of the several Corporations in the said Cities and Towns, and for Relief", simultaneously presented, though also basing itself on the recommendations of Sir Richard Cox's Committee, was passed over,<sup>4</sup> whereas the tailors and shipwrights were able to effect the passage of an act (11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 33)<sup>5</sup> on their behalf.

It is interesting to note the way in which this Act of 1772 provides "for the fixing of wages" and makes "other regulations of industry, amongst which the prohibition of combinations comes as a matter of course".<sup>6</sup> The first

<sup>1</sup> *I C J.* VIII: 491 2

<sup>2</sup> *I C J.* VIII. 497. 2

<sup>3</sup> *I C J.* VIII 501

<sup>4</sup> *I C J.* VIII 497 1

<sup>5</sup> "An act for regulating the journeymen tailors and journeymen shipwrights of the city of Dublin and the liberties thereof, and of the county of Dublin"

<sup>6</sup> S & B Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 ed), p 69

clause provides a penalty of twenty pounds (payable to the informer and the bluecoat hospital) or of three months' imprisonment for persons permitting meetings of journeymen's clubs in their houses or apartments, if oaths were administered or other illegal acts permitted. For the guilty journeymen themselves a fine of ten pounds was substituted<sup>1</sup>. The third clause provides that "the hours of work [for all categories of persons engaged in the tailoring trade in the city or county of Dublin] shall be from six in the morning until eight of the clock at night, excepting only that they shall be allowed one hour for dinner, and half an hour for breakfast, in the time aforesaid; and for the said time or hours of work aforesaid there shall be paid unto every journeyman taylor, or other person employed or to be employed or retained as a journeyman taylor, for his work during the hours aforesaid the wages and sums following according to the skill and abilities of such journeyman, that is to say, any sum not less than one shilling and four pence, and not exceeding one shilling and eight pence, *per diem*, except during the space of three weeks from the publication of any order for a general mourning by the king at arms in the Dublin Gazette, and during that space any sum not exceeding two shillings and sixpence".

Other clauses, to be sure, slightly modified the rigidity of these regulations. Thus, in time of scarcity, prolonged for three months, and under "other circumstances", application might be made for alteration of the rate by judicial action; non-observance of this provision, whether by masters or by men, was made punishable by a fine of one hundred pounds or a prison term of six months. Further wages were "allowed" for "overwork", at the rate of 3*d* per hour in time of general mourning, 2*d*. per hour at other times, if the

<sup>1</sup> The alternative to the fine was commitment or imprisonment for not above three months.



additional time was not less than one hour and the work was "actually performed".

As usual, a provision was included for recovery of unpaid wages. But departure from service before their time or before the work was finished, and refusing employment for the stipulated wages or hours, even in the absence of combination, was made punishable, unless cause was allowed by two justices, by a fine of ten pounds, payable to the informer and to the blue coat hospital. Workers taking more than their legal wages were to be fined ten pounds or committed for three months. Masters convicted of paying greater wages, in money or otherwise,—“poaching”, in the wording of the statute—were to be fined one hundred pounds. Any wage agreement contrary to the terms of the act was declared void.

The foregoing clauses, applying to journeymen tailors, were extended by other clauses of the Act to include the shipwrights, save as to hours of work and rates of wages. Shipwrights' work hours "shall be from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the afternoon, excepting only that they shall be allowed one hour for dinner and half an hour for breakfast in the time aforesaid, without esteeming a tide's work only a day's work, when they grave or coat a vessel". The wage-rate was to be "according to the skill and abilities of such journeymen, any sum not less than two shillings and not exceeding two shillings and six pence a day".

"A Bill to regulate the Trades of Masons, Bricklayers, Slaters, Stone-Cutters, Workers in Stucco, Plasterers, Carpenters, and Painters, and to prevent unlawful Combinations in the different Trades" seems to have failed of passage only because of the inconsiderateness of a Member who "died suddenly in the House", as that body was entering upon consideration of the bill<sup>1</sup>. At all events, the House

<sup>1</sup> *I. C. J.*. VIII. 490

immediately adjourned, and further trace of this bill does not appear in its Journal. Similar legislation was, however, passed in 1780 for the silk manufacture (19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 24) and for the provision trade (19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 36).

Early in 1774 the Master, Wardens, and Brethren of the Corporation of Weavers, humbly conceiving the efficacy of the "Protestant Religion", at least as far as the manufactures of the kingdom were concerned, to be threatened, applied to Parliament to rescue both the manufactures and the religion. It appears that the narrow worsted weavers had formed a combination to protect themselves against the competition of workhouse children; in Ireland, as in England, the governors of public charity institutions were accustomed to put their charges out as apprentices. The regular journeymen, feeling that the competition of this source of cheap labour reacted unfavourably on their own wage-scale, demanded that such children should not be taken as apprentices. In Ireland, however, it was possible for the manufacturers further to confuse the issue by pointing out that "the very salutary Ends of those most useful Seminaries of the Protestant Religion" (i. e., the Charter-Schools and the Work-House, in which these children, whatever the creed of their parents, were educated) would "be in a great Measure defeated"—to say nothing of the loss to the manufacturers themselves—if "some effectual Law for the Prevention of those Combinations in future" were not timely enacted. Their petition was supported by one presented by the "Governors of the Foundling-Hospital and Workhouse of the City of Dublin" themselves, "most earnestly recommending the said Petition of the Weavers to the Consideration of the House". The House referred the matter to a committee vested with "Power to send for Persons and Papers, and to examine in the most solemn Manner, such persons as they shall think proper, upon the subject Matter

of the said Petition".<sup>1</sup> This extreme solemnity did not, however, produce any further action by the legislature.

The year 1780 is of outstanding importance in the annals of Irish labour history. In May of that year "the Master and Wardens of the Corporation of Hosiers, on Behalf of themselves and the Rest of the Employers in said Business in the City of Dublin" ventured to take the offensive against their employees. Their petition set forth that "in the Year 1749, the Journeymen Stocking-makers entered into a Combination, and formed a Bill of Rates, therein specifying the Prices to be paid by their Employers for the different Kinds of Work then made in the City of Dublin; to which Bill of Rates they compelled their Employers to sign their Assent, by turning out and refusing to work until their Demand was complied with; and even by sending back to some Master-Hosiers their Frames, which are all made of Iron, under a heavy Shower of Rain". Urging that these rates were one-third higher than those currently paid in England for the same classes of labour, and that the limitations imposed on the taking of apprentices likewise operated to prevent them from introducing the new, costly machines employed in England, they perceived "two material Evils, viz. they have disabled the Irish Employer from entering into a Competition with his English Neighbour, and they have extinguished among the Artisans that Spirit of Emulation which is necessary to the Advancement of every Trade". The petitioners refrained from suggesting specific legislation, content to "humbly submit the aforesaid Facts to the Consideration of the House, in full Reliance that such Methods will be devised as shall be effectual for removing every Obstruction to the Success of that capital Branch of Trade: And they do further humbly beg Leave to declare it as their sincere and utmost Wish, that they may be placed

<sup>1</sup>*I. C. J.* IX. 100.

on the same Footing with the English Manufacturer in every Respect" <sup>1</sup>

A fortnight later, a "Petition of the Master, Wardens, and Freemen of the Corporation of Glovers and Skinners, or Guild of the Blessed *Virgin Mary*, Dublin" was presented to the House. This Protestant organisation, appealing to a Protestant legislature in a Catholic country, was shrewd enough to stress the interest of the Ascendancy. It set forth: "That Petitioners are very much distressed and injured in their Trade and Business these several Years past by a Set of Papist Masters and Journeymen Skinners, who hold a Combination together, which Combination Petitioners have endeavoured all in their Power to break, but to no Effect, and humbly submitting the Premises to the Consideration of the House" <sup>2</sup> Both of these petitions were referred to the General Committee for Trade

The bill presented early in June by Sir Lucius O'Brien <sup>3</sup> evoked bitter protest both from the workers and from the Catholic masters. On the same day that the bill went into committee stage, counter petitions were presented, one on behalf of the artificers affected, <sup>4</sup> another on behalf of the "Skinners of Dublin, Non-freemen", <sup>5</sup> humbly praying that no law be passed to their prejudice, without their being heard by counsel. This much was conceded to them, Papists though they might be. The Skinners of the City of Dublin, Non-freemen (i.e., masters, but Catholics), in their petition, detailed at great length the history of the relations between Protestant and Catholic employers in that trade and of their dealings with their journeymen. They imputed the

<sup>1</sup> *I. C. J.* X. 120

<sup>2</sup> *I. C. J.* X. 137

<sup>3</sup> *I. C. J.* X. 153

<sup>4</sup> *I. C. J.* X. 156

<sup>5</sup> *I. C. J.* X. 158-9.

action of the Freemen to a factional spirit, alleging that of the eighteen members of the Guild who had signed the petition, "there is about six of them Skinners, the Remainder being persons having honorary or complimentary Freedoms in the Corporation of Skinners". It appeared that both Freemen and Non-freemen had suffered from the demands of the journeymen; but, whereas the Non-freemen had made every effort to cooperate with their fellow-employers, the Guild had insisted on the payment of quarterage as the price of its aid, though several of its members had associated themselves individually with the Non-freemen. Though the first turn-out of the journeymen had been rendered abortive by their reduction to starvation in three months' time, the journeymen did not become sorry for their past conduct, but combined anew, and presented fresh demands. "The said Masters Non-freemen, dreading that their Journeymen would again combine, and refuse to work at a Time that their Goods were subject to be perished, and as an Inducement to their not doing so in future, the Non-freemen, with the Approbation of the Freemen, agreed to give their Journeymen the Wages demanded, upon being solemnly assured that they would not combine." Ultimately, "the Non-freemen were drove to the Necessity to enter into a Resolution amongst themselves, for the Purpose of keeping a watchful Eye over the Conduct of their Journeymen, and to preserve Peace and good Order and particularly that they would fulfil the Promise made of paying the Wages stipulated, but in any Resolution made or at any Meeting had there, were no Resolutions or Agreements entered into, that could in any Respect be injurious or prejudicial to the Freemen or any other Branch of their Trade, and upon such occasions, or on any other respecting the said Trade, no Oath whatever was tended to or taken by any of the Non-freemen, to the Prejudice of either Freemen or Journey-

men, or any other Person who had any Concern in said Trade, which can, if necessary, be testified by several Protestants and Freemen who were present at such Meetings". They professed themselves to be "total strangers to the Conduct of their Journeymen, as charged by the said Petition, and they have not either excited or encouraged them to do any Act inimical to the Good of Trade, but have always endeavoured to make them behave soberly, honestly, and industriously; that the Petitioners, in order to encourage their Journeymen, and through Motives of Humanity, and with no other Intent whatever, mutually agreed to subscribe 3*d.* a Piece a Week for themselves and each Apprentice, and recommended the Journeymen to adopt the same Resolution, to the Intent that a Fund might be created for the Support of such of the sober industrious Journeymen as should happen to be sick, whilst indisposed, and to relieve the Widows and Orphans of such deceased Journeymen, and which Subscription was divided without Distinction, as well to the Freemen, as Non-freemen and their Widows, which Conduct Petitioners humbly conceive ought to be considered in a benevolent Light, and not misconstrued to the Prejudice of Petitioners under the Denomination of Combination".

The Act of 1780 (19 & 20 Geo. III, c 19),<sup>1</sup> in its preamble, suggests a departure from earlier mercantilist principles in the direction advocated four years earlier by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. "In order to secure to every man the full enjoyment of that property he has in his own labour, to find employment for the industrious, and bread for the poor, and to extend throughout this ancient kingdom all the benefits of free trade", all combinations among masters or journeymen are proclaimed "publick nuisances", which ought to be suppressed, and all civil offi-

"An Act to prevent Combinations, and for the further Encouragement of Trade."

cers are instructed to oppose them and prosecute all persons concerned.<sup>1</sup> The terms of the act, however, appear to be in direct response to the petitions of the Protestant masters, rather than an expression of Parliament's adherence to any particular system of political economy. The fact that regulative codes for the silk industry<sup>2</sup> and for the provision trade<sup>3</sup> were enacted later in this same year, indicates that the new doctrine had not penetrated very deeply, if at all, into the consciousness of Ireland's legislators.

Acts to be taken as evidence of unlawful combination and sufficient to convict the perpetrators thereof are carefully listed in the Act of 1780: no Espionage Act or Lusk law was ever more thorough in including even the most tenuous connection with the suspected organisation, more elastic in requiring less evidence for conviction, or more supremely indifferent to the objects and motives of offenders. Even departing service before the expiry of the stipulated term, quitting work for three days, or returning work unfinished without the master's consent, unless cause were shown, was made evidence of combination and sufficient to convict. The death penalty—without benefit of clergy—is provided for certain acts of violence, anticipatory of the Luddites and the Land Leaguers

Limitations on the taking of apprentices are simultaneously removed. Any journeyman or master may take as many apprentices as he thinks fit, irrespective of the creed of either employer or apprentice.

Even in this statute, whose provisions bear so harshly on workers' combinations, Parliament showed some considera-

<sup>1</sup> "Free Trade" in Ireland at this time meant, however, simply the removal of restrictions imposed in the interests of English merchants and manufacturers.

<sup>2</sup> 19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 24.

<sup>3</sup> 19 & 20 Geo. III, c. 36.

tion for the interests of the workers as well as for those of the masters. It is, of course, true that the workers were unable to accept the official notion that their interests were being sufficiently looked after by an impartial legislature. Yet we find that an employer retaining workers and delivering the warp to weave or set in loom, yet keeping his men idle for the space of three days for want of materials, shall pay them so much per day as could be reasonably earned, said sums to be levied by distress on warrant.

The legislation of Grattan's Parliament definitely diverges from the contemporary legislative tendency at Westminster. At College Green, mercantilism was in the ascendant. While the restraints which fettered Irish trade and industry in England's interest were loosened, every effort was made by the independent Irish Parliament to foster and encourage Irish manufactures and commerce. Liberal bounties were granted to producers and exporters operating under official supervision; candidates for such bounties were required to comply with the regulative codes enacted by the legislature. The policy which, at Westminster, no longer attained more than sporadic expression, was wholeheartedly embraced by Grattan's Parliament.

It seems that in this period of industrial prosperity labour, particularly skilled labour, was in demand. Legislation is noticeably less harsh toward the workers, in consequence. An interesting statute of 1785 (25 Geo III, c. 17), "An Act to prevent the Practice of seducing Artificers and Manufacturers of this Kingdom, and of exporting the several Tools and Utensils made Use of in preparing and working up the Manufactures thereof, into Parts beyond the Seas", provides heavy penalties for the seducers, though none for their victims. Persons contracting with, enticing, or persuading any manufacturer, workman, or artificer, of or in any of the manufactures of the kingdom, to go to any



country not in the dominions of or belonging to Great Britain, shall for every one so contracted with, etc., forfeit five hundred pounds and be imprisoned for twelve months; and for every subsequent offence, one thousand pounds, and be imprisoned for two years.<sup>1</sup>

Even the provisions against combinator were somewhat relaxed. Another Act of 1785,<sup>2</sup> designed to stimulate the woollen and other manufactures, granted funds to trustees to be distributed as bounties according to the stipulations of the act. The trustees were empowered to examine upon oath "persons concerned in any of the manufactures mentioned in this act, . . . as to the rates of labour, &c (and prices of workmanship thereof, and the real value of such labour and workmanship) and they may regulate the same". To be sure, persons taking, or even demanding, higher rates than those so ascertained, are to forfeit twenty pounds; persons paying higher rates, even as a gift, are likewise to forfeit twenty pounds, besides being disqualified for the bounty. Again, in suits brought by any master against a working manufacturer or journeyman, or *vice versa*,\*if the plaintiff file an affidavit that he entered into no combination, etc., and if the defendant prove that he did, judgment is rendered against the combinator, who shall pay the full costs of the action. On the other hand, mercy is accorded to repentant sinners. Despite the provisions of the Act of 1780 (19 & 20 Geo III, c 19), persons who were in any combination, &c. previous to 25th March, 1785, but who enter an affidavit with the trustees that they will not in future observe such or enter into any other, etc., shall under no circumstances be prosecuted for their past offences, whatever their conduct in the future.

The labour scarcity evidently caused the dreaded "Prac-

<sup>1</sup> 25 Geo. III, c. 17, sect. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 25 Geo III, c 48

tice of seducing Artificers" to affect the harmonious relations of Irish manufacturers. Under this Act, any person in Dublin or its liberties,<sup>1</sup> seducing a journeyman manufacturer from his employer, was to forfeit fifty pounds, and, if a freeman, was to cease to be so.

An Act of 1787 entitled "An Act to prevent tumultuous Risings and Assemblies, and for the more effectual Punishment of Persons guilty of Outrage, Riot, and illegal Combination, and of administering and taking unlawful Oaths",<sup>2</sup> is not directed against the usual combinations of artisans in the towns. On the contrary, it represents an attempt to suppress peasant organisations (Whiteboys, Steelboys, etc.) and, in particular, to enforce payment of tithes.<sup>3</sup>

One more instance may be cited of the solicitude of Grattan's Parliament for the welfare of the artisan and hence of the industrial prosperity of the Kingdom. In an Act of 1792 (32 Geo III, c. 19)<sup>4</sup> occur certain provisions that are well worthy of serious consideration by the Oireachtas to-day. Persons agreeing to pay "so much money for wages, and such a quantity of spiritous liquors, in lieu of the wages or any part thereof" or deducting "all or any part of the wages or hire due to any journeyman, &c for any spiritous liquors delivered to him" shall for every such offence forfeit the sum of forty shillings, payable in equal shares to the informer or prosecutor, and to the churchwardens of the parish for the benefit of the poor, provision

<sup>1</sup> The Coombe district, where the Archbishop formerly exercised feudal jurisdiction.

<sup>2</sup> 27 Geo III, c. 15.

<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting to check off the methods of the peasantry, as indicated in the provisions of this statute, against the methods currently employed in the West of Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> "An Act for continuung and amending an Act, Entitled, An Act for regulating the issuing of Licenses for the Sale of Spiritous Liquors by Retail, and for remedying the Abuses which have arisen from the immoderate Use of such Liquors."

is included for recovery of the full wages. Furthermore, journeymen, etc. are not to be paid in public houses, even though full wages be paid in money, under penalty of a fine of ten pounds; payments so made are declared void

To reenforce these provisions, it is enacted that no license is to be granted in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, or Waterford, unless the licensee and two others, not distillers or publicans, enter into a bond for fifty pounds (in other parts of the country twenty pounds). Among other conditions of the bond the publican must agree not to "sell any spiritous liquors to any trades-men, artificers, or labourers, resorting to his or her house for the purpose of receiving wages due to them; and shall not wittingly or knowingly entertain any artificers or trades-men assembling for the purpose of entering into any unlawful combination". These provisions were reproduced in the amending Acts of 1796<sup>1</sup> and 1797.<sup>2</sup>

In 1803, after the Union, the Westminster Parliament passed a special anti-combination law for Ireland (43 Geo. III, c. 86), couched in almost the identical language of the British Act of 1800 (39 & 40 Geo. III, c. 106). The terms of this Act are, however, decidedly harsher than those of the Act of 1800, and much more severe than the legislation of the Irish Parliament. In both the statutes of the British Parliament the acts specified as unlawful are described in identical terms;<sup>3</sup> but, in the Act of 1803, which applies to Ireland only, the penalty provided is not more than six months' imprisonment in the common gaol, or three months at hard labour in the House of Correction,<sup>4</sup> whereas in the

<sup>1</sup> 36 Geo. III, c. 40, sect. 39, 40, & 7

<sup>2</sup> 37 Geo. III, c. 45, sect. 42, 43, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Sect. 1, 3, 4, & 5 of 39 & 40 Geo. III, c. 106 and of 43 Geo. III, c. 86. But in the Act of 1803 a later section (§ 8) provides also against sabotage.

<sup>4</sup> 43 Geo. III, c. 86, sect. 2.

British Acts of 1799 (39 Geo III, c. 81) and 1800 the penalty is three months, or two months, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, while contributing to the combinator's funds is in both countries punishable by a fine of not more than ten pounds, the penalty for collecting such funds is, in the case of Ireland, also ten pounds, but in the case of Great Britain, only five pounds.<sup>2</sup>

Certain clauses, however, are not common to both Acts. Thus, the Act of 1803 contains no provision against masters combining to depress the workers' wages or to lengthen their hours of labour,<sup>3</sup> nor does it contain any arbitration provisions whatsoever.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, there is inserted in the law to be applied to Ireland a provision that no master in the trade concerned shall act as a justice in any proceedings under the combination law.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, there are also inserted in this statute the old familiar provisions that persons refusing to work, or absenting themselves from work during their engagement, unless good cause be proved, preventing others from working or molesting them in their occupation, or returning their work unfinished, shall be subject to the same penalties as combinator's, and that masters convicted of poaching are to be fined not less than five pounds nor more than twenty pounds for each offence. Owners of houses used for purposes of combination are made liable to the same fine.<sup>6</sup>

This Act of 1803 was intended to reenforce the operation of the admittedly ineffective Irish combination laws, not to

<sup>1</sup> 39 Geo III, c. 81, sect. 2, 39 & 40 Geo III, c. 106, sect. 2

<sup>2</sup> 39 Geo III, c. 81, sect. 5; 39 & 40 Geo III, c. 106, sect. 5, 43 Geo. III, c. 86, sect. 5

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 39 & 40 Geo III, c. 106, sect. 17

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, sect. 18-22

<sup>5</sup> 39 & 40 Geo III, c. 106, sect. 16, 43 Geo III, c. 86, sect. 12

<sup>6</sup> 43 Geo. III, c. 86, sect. 6, 7, 10

supersede them. The industrial legislation of the Irish Parliament remained in force, almost unchanged so far as it directly affected the working classes, until the wholesale repeal of the old combination laws in 1824 and 1825. In the list of statutes then repealed, in whole or in part, are eleven Irish statutes,<sup>1</sup> as well as three post-Union acts<sup>2</sup> applying only to Ireland. The provisions of the Acts of 1824 (5 Geo. IV, c. 95) and 1825 (6 Geo. IV, c. 129) apply equally to Great Britain and to Ireland. Thenceforth, Irish and British craftsmen and factory operatives were to be on the same footing, at least in the eyes of the law

<sup>1</sup> 33 Henry VIII, st 1, c 9; 3 Geo II, c 14, 17 Geo II, c 8; 3 Geo III, c 17 & c 34, 11 & 12 Geo III, c 18 & c 33, 19 & 20 Geo III, c 19, c. 24, c 36; 25 Geo III, c 48

<sup>2</sup> 43 Geo III, c 86, 47 Geo. III, st 1, c 43, 57 Geo III, c. 122.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY IRISH TRADE UNIONISM: OBJECTS AND METHODS

ON the basis of the foregoing narrative, supplemented by an examination of the Reports of various Select Committees of Parliament,<sup>1</sup> it is impossible to maintain the hypothesis of difference on any of the lines of reasoning suggested in Chapter I. It may at once be admitted that Ireland, whose industries, so far as they were competitive with those of England, had been deliberately destroyed by the English Parliament, remained, despite the efforts of Grattan's Parliament, an agricultural country. Her trades and industries were not so developed as those of the sister isle; the Industrial Revolution progressed, perhaps, more slowly in Ireland than across the Channel. As Ireland's population, at the beginning of the century, was proportionately greater than that of the larger and more industrialised

<sup>1</sup> Artizans and Machinery (1824, vol v); Combination Laws (1825, vol iv); Combinations of Workmen (1837-8, vol viii). See also Third Report of Commissioners for inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland (1836, vol xxx). Much additional information is to be derived from contemporary books and pamphlets, George O'Brien has brought together considerable material of this sort in his section on combinations of workers in *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine*. As this material merely parallels and supplements that contained in the more generally accessible *Parliamentary Papers*, the references in this chapter have been confined to the latter; even so, it has, of course, not been possible, in the limited space available, to cite more than a few typical references on each point.

island,<sup>1</sup> and as the rate of increase showed no tendency to diminish, a vast number of the rural population could find no means of subsistence at home. It was, as it still is, the custom of the poorer peasantry to migrate seasonally to seek employment in England or Scotland during harvest time.<sup>2</sup> It follows that unemployment was ever more acute in Ireland than in England. The surplus population of the rural districts naturally sought industrial employment, providing the Irish manufacturer or master craftsman with an abundant source of cheap labour. Though Irish workers emigrated to Great Britain in such numbers as to glut the labour market there, it is obvious that the competition for employment was far more severe in Ireland itself. It is, then, not surprising that the wages of labour have notoriously been lower in Ireland than in England. Although these facts, and the fact of a separate legislature in Dublin up to 1800, necessarily resulted in differences in detail, nevertheless, fundamentally there is no discernible difference between the Irish and British industrial working classes and their respective reactions to the rise of capitalist industrialism and to the introduction of the factory system. The difference is a matter of degree, not of kind.

Irish artisans and labourers, like their fellows in Great Britain, pursued the only feasible policy in struggling, by means of combinations, to prevent depression of their wages,

	Great Britain	Ireland	
	Pop. sq. mi.	Pop. sq. mi.	% increase
1801 . . . . .	118	166	
1811 . . . . .	135	186	12.0
1821 . . . . .	159	209	12.3
1831 . . . . .	183	239	14.35
1841 . . . . .	209	251	5
1851 . . . . .	235	201	-20.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the following Continental writers. Cardinal Perraud, *Études sur l'Irlande contemporaine* (Paris, 1862); Gustave de Beaumont, *L'Irlande sociale, politique, et religieuse* (Paris, 1865); Julius Rodenberg, *Die Insel der Heiligen*

increase in the hours of work, worsening of the conditions of labour — in general, to protect themselves against the modernisation of industry as expressed in the spread of the domestic system and, later and more especially, of the factory system. Labour philosophy of the forward-looking kind is, naturally, not to be expected. Workingmen were slow to realise, much slower than their middle-class paladins, that the old days were irretrievably gone. The goal of their endeavours was neither to restore a primitive agricultural and pastoral existence, nor to enter into the enjoyment of their rightful heritage, the ownership and control of the means of production, but simply and solely to maintain the conditions to which they were accustomed. Theirs was not a forward or a backward movement, theirs was a conservative aim. Irish Trade Unionism was not a Labour Movement. The activity of Irish labour organisations was induced by inertia, not by dynamic force.

It is unnecessary, for the purposes of this study, to present a narrative history of Irish trade unionism in the nineteenth century, or to divide the study of it into what must be more or less artificial periods. The aims and methods of the combinatorians, and the nature of their organisations show no marked differences throughout. Their specific demands and the degree of success they experienced in striving for them varied, of course, with the trade concerned. Decline of industrial prosperity, increased use of machinery, employment of women and children, decreased demand for the services of skilled craftsmen, surplusage of labour — all tended to weaken the position of trade unionists. On the other hand, increased facility of communication and the general levelling of labour conditions throughout the United Kingdom caused the growth of kingdom-wide unions, with which many of the old Irish unions affiliated. As new unions arose in England, they established Irish branches, in



self-defence against Ireland's surplus labour. Thus, Irish trade unionism, which had arisen in response to the same stimuli as had British trade unionism, and which had developed on a roughly parallel course, came to be the caudal appendage of the latter. It was long, however, before the tail was strong enough to wag the dog, when, in the present century, it attempted that feat, it succeeded rather in nearly wagging itself loose from the bulkier portion.

As the natural history of the whole animal has given rise to a monumental work, it will be sufficient here to summarize the main features of Irish trade unionism to the middle of the last century. If, in so doing, several current fallacies can be disposed of, the attempt, remote as it may seem from the nationalist issue, will not be valueless.

The aims of the combinatorians appear plainly. First and foremost was the struggle against depression of their wage-level. The chief instrument in wage-depression appeared to the journeymen to consist in the excessive use of apprentices, who were turned adrift at the expiration of their term. Inasmuch as there was no demand for their services, journeymen were unable to get journeymen's wages. Limitations on the taking of apprentices therefore occupy a prominent place in the artisans' demands. When skilled labour is not in demand because it is skilled, the only hope for finding it employment at its accustomed wages is to prohibit or restrict the employment of unskilled labour. To plead that, because of new conditions and peculiar difficulties of manufacture, the labourer should content himself with miserable wages may not be as silly as, but is not less illogical than, to argue that, for these same reasons, employers should be willing to operate their businesses at a loss. If it was not to be expected that the individual Irish capitalist, for the good of Irish industry in the abstract, would forego his individual enjoyment of the just return on his capital, it is no

less childish to expect that the Irish labourer would, for that same reason, see himself and his family sink into poverty and destitution, or to condemn him as intransigent for failing tamely to submit in the interests of the Nation.

It has been asserted and reasserted and repeatedly reiterated that shipbuilding was driven from Dublin by the oppressive rules of the ship-carpenters' union.<sup>1</sup> Allusion has already been made to the petition of the master shipwrights of Dublin in 1772.<sup>2</sup> Among other complaints, this petition set forth that the journeymen shipwrights "have again deserted their Work, under Pretence that the Master Shipwrights take too many Apprentices, as appears by Circular Letters written by them to the Masters, in which they desire to limit the Number to be employed by each Master to two, in order thereby to lessen the Number of the most useful Workmen to the Royal Navy, and Bulwark of Great Britain".<sup>3</sup>

This limitation on the taking of apprentices is the feature of the union's activities that has been most subjected to criticism. The theme was further developed and embroidered in 1838, at Daniel O'Connell's instigation,<sup>4</sup> by an exporter of ship-timbers.<sup>5</sup> To O'Connell's suggestion that the

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, *op cit*, p 466, 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of Messrs Fagan and Morton, *vide infra*, J J Webb, *Industrial Dublin since 1698*, p 81, O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the 18th Century*, p 48, etc., etc

<sup>2</sup> Cf *supra*, chapter II, p 43

<sup>3</sup> I C J viii 497 The reason assigned for the limitation is a deliberate misrepresentation. It appears from the same petition that "Numbers of those who served their Time to that most useful Occupation in this City, on the late Appearance of a War, went over to his Majesty's Yards in England, and have not since returned"

<sup>4</sup> The 1838 Committee had been appointed in consequence of O'Connell's indictment of trade unionism on the floor of the House of Commons Cf Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, vol xl, pp. 1084-1097. O'Connell, as a member of this committee, took a prominent part in the investigation.

<sup>5</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of James Fagan, Esq.

ship-building trade had been almost annihilated by combination in Dublin, this gentleman heartily replied that it had been completely so; a Mr. Morton "had been completely broken by attempting to put down the combination in the business". To be precise, it was the murder of a workman (Mr. Fagan was "almost sure of two") about 10 o'clock in the morning, about 1823,<sup>1</sup> "that was a complete finish of the ship-building".<sup>2</sup> To be sure, he could not say that ship-building had ever been extensive in Dublin within his recollection.<sup>3</sup> Though Dublin had many more advantages than Drogheda, ship-building was increasing at the latter port. The trouble at Dublin was all due to the fact that in Dublin no master carpenter was allowed to exceed three apprentices. While part of the business had gone to Greenwich, a very good business was being done in Belfast by a Scotchman who had defeated combination; in Belfast, Drogheda, and Waterford, where a man could employ as many apprentices as he liked, prosperity for shipwrights was just over the horizon. Even in Cork, where there was very strong combination, ship-building was increasing.

Mr. Morton, the gentleman whose business was alleged to have been ruined by the arbitrary rules of the Dublin combination, was also examined by O'Connell, who endeavoured to get from him testimony to clinch the case against the shipwrights' trade union. Mr. Morton had become a ship-builder in Dublin in 1812.<sup>4</sup> At that date there were

<sup>1</sup> "In what year?—I could not distinctly state it" As a matter of fact, the murder was committed in 1825 (*ibid*, evidence of Mr. Morton).

<sup>2</sup> "3921: That murder put an end to shipbuilding in Dublin?—It did" (*ibid.*).

<sup>3</sup> He had been 23½ years in business; he recollected seeing two or three vessels upon the stocks

<sup>4</sup> "In 1812; and 1811 I commanded an armed vessel between London and Dublin, and I went out on a foreign voyage; and on my passage home she foundered, and my friends recommended me to leave off going to sea, and to commence ship-building" "Was the armed vessel a privateer?—No; we were armed to protect the linen trade and the tea trade."

four other ship-building firms in Dublin; in 1838 there were still four. Ship-building "is extinguished altogether in Dublin", no doubt due to the combination of the workmen; Mr Morton did "not see any other cause whatever". "There is not a finer establishment in the world than the establishment I had, . . . it is worth nothing whatever now" <sup>1</sup> Yet, when asked why he had abandoned the business eight or ten years before, he replied: "Because the trade got so very bad, and the number of apprentices I had in the establishment was so extensive, that I thought it much better to give it up as a ship-builder, because the traders sent their ships elsewhere" <sup>2</sup>

Despite the superior conveniences at Dublin, said Mr. Morton, ship-building had established itself within the last two years at Waterford, Cork, Belfast, and Drogheda. Mr. Morton further testified, however, that all the steamers plying between Dublin and other ports were built in "Scotland, and England, and Bristol"; significantly enough, "the large timber vessels are built in Nova Scotia".

At the close of his testimony, the witness, who had responded faithfully to O'Connell's carefully regimented questions, was caught off his guard by another member of the Select Committee. Apparently irritated by the simplicity of his questioner, he testily acknowledged that the limitation of apprentices, a feature peculiar to the Dublin combination,

<sup>1</sup> Mr Morton had built the only steamer ever built in Dublin

<sup>2</sup> In the presence of such authoritative evidence as this, it is, perhaps, superfluous to quote the testimony of the operative shipwrights: "The masters, for the sake of putting a little money in their pockets, were in the habit of taking apprentices *without limit*. The consequence was, the work was so *badly done* that it occasioned vessels to leave this port when in want of repair, . . . The journeymen wish for piece-work, but the masters will not agree to it. When the men work by day 4s 10½d is charged by the employer, but the men receive only 4s 6d. the 4½d is the masters' profit on the men, and for this reason the masters object to piece-work" (1836 Report, *op. cit.*, p 38c)

was not his real grievance; his chief grievance, "of course", was the fact that he was compelled to pay the same wages to every man, good, bad, or indifferent.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely the complaint of master shipwrights from the Thames, the Tyne, the Mersey, the Severn, and the Clyde.<sup>2</sup> The self-contradictory evidence offered on behalf of Dublin ship-builders does not, when compared with the mass of evidence submitted by British ship-builders and their foremen to the Select Committees of 1824 and 1825, disclose that the Irish masters laboured under any peculiar difficulties with respect to their men. Much more plausible is the explanation offered in 1824 by William Hall, solicitor, viz, want of capital, and want of trade. He agreed that trade had left Dublin very much in consequence of disputes between the masters and the men, "for there is a line of demarcation drawn between masters and journeymen generally; the masters will not treat with the men, they rely mostly on the Combination Law giving them great advantages, and will not bend at all to the men"<sup>3</sup>

Though many masters, as in this case of the ship-builders, based their objections to the limitation of apprentices on the high ground of danger to the future welfare of the trade, many others frankly admitted quite different reasons. Thus, instead of viewing with alarm the prospect of the next generation, deprived, through the selfishness of the present workmen, of a sufficient supply of skilled labour, Mr. Jeremiah Houghton, woollen manufacturer, of Celbridge, testified in 1824 that "it is the interest of the masters to employ apprentices, and by that means to reduce the wages".<sup>4</sup> The bulk of the masters who gave testimony before the

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Robert Morton, Esq.

<sup>2</sup> Cf 1825 Report, *op cit*

<sup>3</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, p 466

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 291

Select Committees of 1824, 1825, and 1838 agreed, explicitly or implicitly, with this view of the matter. In many cases, a fee must be paid to the master on behalf of the prospective apprentice; in most cases no wages nor even subsistence were given for the first two or three years of the apprenticeship; for the remainder of the term slowly increasing wages were paid, seldom, however, exceeding one-half of a journeyman's wages. At the expiration of his service, the man was turned adrift; his training was of no value to him as there was an overabundant supply of journeymen.

In the printing trade skilled workmen were in more demand. The masters, therefore, did not feel so strongly against the limitation of apprentices. The star witness for the masters was a sturdy Dissenter, Mr. P. D. Hardy, who had been fourteen years a printer and publisher in Dublin; even earlier he had been editor of the *Irish Times*. It was his custom, in taking apprentices, to require the payment of a fee of twenty pounds from the parents; in addition, the parties binding the apprentice must board and lodge him for the first two years of his service. Beginning the third year, Mr. Hardy paid his apprentices 5s a week; the amount increased gradually to the seventh and last year, when the rate was 10s. a week. Journeymen compositors received 30s a week<sup>1</sup>. The proprietor, editor, and printer of the *Newry Commercial Telegraph* did not ask for a premium. However, the parents had to support the apprentice for the first two years of his term, and the wages Mr. Henderson paid during the remaining five years were 20 per cent under those paid by Mr. Hardy. Mr. Henderson, in Newry, paid his journeymen 25s. a week<sup>2</sup>.

These gentlemen, as well as Mr. Staunton, proprietor of

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Philip Dixon Hardy, Esq.

<sup>2</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of James Henderson, Esq.

two Dublin newspapers,<sup>1</sup> were perfectly agreed that the taking of excessive numbers of apprentices was ruinous to the trade, even the proprietor of the *Northern Whig*<sup>2</sup> hinted at the same conclusion. Thus Mr. Hardy:

I believe, from knowing Ireland tolerably well, that in many towns in Ireland, there are offices conducted altogether without a journeyman, where lads are trained as printers; they have come to Dublin, when out of their time, perhaps only half knowing their business, or perhaps not half knowing it; but still they have served seven years, and are printers; and also in Dublin, there are printers who do not employ men at all, but train lads; and if any means could be devised to protect the men in any way, I should say it would be but fair that men having got a good education, and having served seven years, should not be obliged to hunt the world for employment. I should say it is a reasonable thing, if a respectable man serves his time, that at the end of it there should be a fair hope of his being employed; and really there was not, in the way things were going on; there was not employment, at least at times; at other times there was.

He did not think that the evil would correct itself:

I have found out that even in the way of business, work will be done for less than what I consider would be a fair remuneration to the journeymen. Many of the Government contracts, to my knowledge, are done for less than my workmen charge me, and yet I do not consider that my journeymen have more than will be a fair remuneration to a well-educated workman, a man of skill.

Mr. Hardy was not to be trapped by Lord Granville Somerset into taking a narrowly selfish view of the matter. Queried as to the advantages of the unrestricted employment of apprentices, he replied. "It would be beneficial to

<sup>1</sup> The papers were *The Daily Morning Register* and *The Weekly Register*.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hardy, *vide infra*

the employer, but I should not say it would be fair in the present state of the trade; I would not like to create a greater number than would get employment when they were out of their time." He had no faith in natural law as an automatic solution of the difficulty. He would not doubt that in 1835 there were 150 journeymen printers and 200 apprentices; but he "thought it a bad system" For that number of journeymen, 50 apprentices should be ample, provided the business did not increase.

Nor could Daniel O'Connell shame this witness by the portrayal of the injustice to "Tom, Dick, and Harry" wrought by any limitation. Mr Hardy wanted only respectable men, educated men, preferably men with a classical education, as compositors in his establishment That labour should be less remunerated in each case, than that one class should have a monopoly of wages and the rest nothing at all, would be better for the country at large, "if you could create work for them, but you do no good if you merely employ the same number, by giving me a bad set instead of a good set" O'Connell's efforts "to bring [the witness'] mind to the natural checks against overstocking the market, instead of persons associating to exclude their fellow-beings from a chance in the lottery of life of being able to get forward", miscarried

My idea is this that if the men were to look at the thing fairly, it would be thus they would say to the master, "You see how matters are as well as we do, and you see what it will be if you train up boys in this way;" and I think, if the understanding was as it once was between the masters and the men, the fair master would say, "Undoubtedly; I will not take any more apprentices than can be employed when they are out of their time" The compulsory system is what I complain of.

He did not like the restriction imposed in 1836 by the Irish



printers' union that no master, whatever the size of his establishment, should take more than four apprentices. He himself employed thirty or forty men, and thought six or eight apprentices not an unreasonable proportion. To the principle of restriction he adhered, but human reason, not natural law or arbitrary regulation, must be the guide.<sup>1</sup>

Corroborative testimony as to the essential justice of the workers' demand for restrictions on the taking of apprentices was forthcoming from other master printers. Mr. Staunton, proprietor of the *Daily Morning Register* and of the *Weekly Register*, Dublin, believed the proportion of one apprentice to three journeymen to be ample to supply all the wants of the Irish printing trade. He would not be at all surprised if the apprentices exceeded the journeymen printers in numbers in Ireland as a whole, but he believed that in Dublin journeymen were twice as numerous as apprentices. His explanation of this situation was

In a very short space of time, in six months, perhaps, an apprentice can be made useful. There are facilities in country towns of getting boys into offices; and the master printer, by employing them, is able to do the work cheaper by their assistance than he could otherwise execute it for. I think in the country expectations are entertained which are never realized with regard to the earnings of printers. I believe that a parent is more inclined to send his son to a printer, from a notion of there being something important to be done in the metropolis, and that the trade is better there. In the country parts of Ireland a master printer is a respectable person, an individual publishing a paper, and having county work, whose habit is to board apprentices; and there is a facility, under these circumstances, of procuring boys for the trade which does not occur in the metropolis. Thus, the number of journeymen is necessarily increased, and there is a great influx of them in the metropolis.

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Philip Dixon Hardy, Esq

The excess of country supply over metropolitan demand worked very injurious consequences; the evil was increased by the speculative operations of small printers, who, employed on casual work, took apprentices "almost without limitation". This witness, too, failed to serve O'Connell's purposes. Asked whether it were not certain that the number of printers in Dublin could never be kept up at the rate of four apprentices for each employer, Mr. Staunton felt no alarm on that score. Of the 429 printers in Dublin in 1831, not more than half could find employment.<sup>1</sup>

A country printer, Mr. Henderson, of the *Newry Commercial Telegraph*, also testified that, though apprentices were cheaper (his calculations were that two apprentices at 4s a week each were equal in labour power to one journeyman at 25s), yet he should not like to have too many apprentices. Boys would be careless, and were sometimes "of a destructive spirit". The Glasgow regulations admitting one apprentice for each journeyman he thought unwise.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of two to three would, however, be necessary; in the country less than that would not be safe.<sup>3</sup>

In the textile industries, particularly in Belfast, the masters were less concerned with the future of the trade and more interested in present profits. Mr. Thomas Grimshaw, a calico-printer, of Whitehouse, near Belfast, had attempted, in 1835, to add ten or twelve apprentices to the seventeen he already employed; he had forty-three journeymen. The rule of the journeymen permitted him to take the additional apprentices, but required a fee of 5 l. for admission. This

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of Michael Staunton, Esq. Thomas Daly, on behalf of the combination, stated that there were 260 journeymen printers in Dublin, of which number not more than 140 had anything like permanent employment.

<sup>2</sup> "I considered it to be admitting too many apprentices."

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of James Henderson, Esq.

did not square with Mr. Grimshaw's desire "to add a number of apprentices to increase the quantity of work, to get it done at the cheapest rate" The type of employee he desired was not the boy with five pounds in his pocket. Nor would he permit his men to bind the boys, paying the five pounds themselves; he insisted on the choice of his own workmen. In consequence, he had ceased his manufacture <sup>1</sup>

The masters realised clearly enough that the apprenticeship system was the principal obstacle in the way of lowered wages and increased profits. Few of them were unwilling to strive for that goal; to them, increased profits were synonymous with the industrial prosperity of the nation. It follows that they were not hypocritical in identifying the interests of their pockets with the good of trade: capital was good for trade; nothing would bring in so much capital as to line the pockets of those who were public-spirited enough to furnish it. To the men, however, it seemed that industrial prosperity should mean more than the rapid enrichment of the employer of labour. The men realised, no less clearly than did the masters, that the apprenticeship system stood between them and destitution, with consequent subjection to the will of their masters. Testifying before the Select Committee of 1824, Acheson Moore, a working employer, deputed thither by "The Carpenters' Society", Dublin,<sup>2</sup> did not "consider it very unreasonable on the part of the men

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of Thomas Grimshaw, Esq "3130. Is it your opinion, that if labour were free, and cleared of the operation of a monopoly, that that branch of trade would increase in Belfast?— It is probably a matter of doubt as to that; but I have no question that it would be more successful than it is at present, but my own view is, that the trade is actually lost to the neighbourhood of Belfast. I do not say that it is owing altogether to combination; but I think that this is one of the causes. Most decidedly it is the cause that drove us out of the trade, we relinquished it rather than be so much teased and annoyed by it."

<sup>2</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, p. 428

to prevent masters taking what number of apprentices they pleased" "I think there are too many in the business as it is, when I see men that are willing to work, a number of them walking about the streets, and numbers in a state of want; if there were more, it would be worse"<sup>1</sup> Again, John Watkins, testifying on behalf of the journeymen hatters of London, which served as the liaison office for local associations in that trade throughout the United Kingdom, denied that such associations would cease to function in case the Combination Laws were repealed,

for this reason, it is thought, that if the masters were at liberty to take what number of apprentices they chose, the trade, in a very short space of time, would be over-run, and three parts out of four of the year, the greater part of the year, the men would be walking about the streets with little or nothing to do<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that the restrictions on the taking of apprentices occupy the most prominent place in the history of Irish trade disputes.

Second only to the prevention of excessive unemployment as a means of maintaining their standard of living, was the direct fixation of a minimum wage-scale. But, while the workers strove to maintain their wage-level, they do not seem to have sought to advance it. They were by no means devoid of consideration for the welfare of industry, nor does the evidence bear out the assertion that they "sought their own interests with a complete disregard of the peculiar difficulties under which Irish manufacture was carried on"<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the testimony of some Dublin masters to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153. "You consider that association to have the object of lessening the number of hands in the trade, so as to keep the employment regular?—Yes; that is the main object"

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 45

the contrary, it is clear that wages in Ireland were lower than wages in England.<sup>1</sup> This view of the matter is strengthened by an examination of the numerous voluminous Reports and Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committees so frequently appointed to inquire into the State of Ireland. Although such committees were particularly concerned with the causes of agrarian disturbances, they did not neglect the opportunity of investigating the possibility of the employment of English capital in Ireland. Overwhelming evidence was presented to these committees to the effect that "labour is considerably cheaper in Ireland"; "it is quite known, that the price of labour in Ireland is much below the ordinary rate of wages in this country".<sup>2</sup> The assertion that it was easier to increase wages artificially in Dublin than in English towns, owing to the scarcity of labour in Dublin,<sup>3</sup> is

<sup>1</sup> Cf., 1824 Report, *op cit* · Obadiah Willans, woollen manufacturer in the neighbourhood of Dublin, was one of those employers who testified before Mr. Hume's Committee that wages were "much higher in Ireland than in England" (p. 283); he had a factory in Leeds. When pinned down to a comparison of the wages he paid in Dublin and in Leeds, he admitted that the wages were higher in Leeds, because "we make principally fine goods in Leeds" (p. 286). Nevertheless, he was sure that other manufacturers—"coarse manufacturers"—in the neighbourhood of Leeds "get their work done considerably lower". He had already testified (p. 283) that his Dublin wages were considerably above those paid by other employers there. Jeremiah Houghton, a provincial woollen manufacturer, also asserted that higher wages were paid in Ireland than in England; yet the only evidence he could give in support of his contention was that for bloom coatings the rate of wages was from 3*d.* to 3½*d.* in Ireland, in England 2½*d.* to 3*d.*—this under the protection of the Union duties (p. 286). This type of evidence, weak in itself, is entirely refuted by a comparison of rates of wages paid in various parts of the United Kingdom, as given in the Minutes of Evidence of these Select Committees.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1825, vol. viii · Report from the Select Committee on the State of Ireland with the Four Reports of Minutes of Evidence, p. 322 and p. 323.

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Mr. Fagan, 4158.

simply ridiculous in the light of the constant emigration of labourers, skilled and unskilled, from Ireland to seek higher wages and better living conditions in Great Britain.

The masters naturally felt that if they had to pay higher wages than their British competitors paid, they would be at a serious disadvantage; more, they were anxious to establish lower rates than were currently paid in Great Britain, in order to place themselves at an advantage. The assumption that provisions would inevitably be cheaper in Ireland encouraged and justified the payment of lower wages by Irish masters. On the other hand, the falsity of this assumption and the protection afforded by the Union duties would seem to have called for the payment of higher rates in Ireland. Thus, William Mackie, a Dublin builder, testified in 1838, "I think a man can live cheaper in Glasgow than in Dublin; I think a man in Dublin ought to have higher wages than a man in Glasgow".<sup>1</sup> Again, Jeremiah Houghton, woollen manufacturer, of Celbridge, co Kildare, though asserting that he paid higher wages generally in his business than were paid in England for the same class of work, admitted that the Union duties "have afforded a protection to us as manufacturers, and enabled us to give greater wages". He acknowledged that, owing to the poverty-stricken "state of the farmers", provisions were generally cheaper in the manufacturing towns of England than in Ireland itself.<sup>2</sup>

The price of commodities and the state of the trade were reflected in the demands of the combinators. If the price of foodstuffs rose, they sought an increase in their money wages, which they voluntarily abandoned when prices fell

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit* house-rent, coals, clothing, and provisions were all higher in Dublin

<sup>2</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, p 286 and p 290. "they must sell their corn to pay their rents, and the corn goes from every port of Ireland, and the markets in Liverpool are glutted"

again. For instance, ever since 1803 journeymen carpenters had been paid 26s. Irish a week "In 1806, there was a strike or a rise attempted", to 30s a week. The attempt failed owing to prosecution of the men's committee.<sup>1</sup> In 1811, however, "we applied to the recorder, and he gave us the liberty of demanding from our employers 5s a day". The employers paid 30s a week "till after 1816, then a great change took place, provisions falling, and business wearing a worse aspect, we surrendered the demand of our own accord without being asked". This time combination was unopposed by the masters, and wages were reduced to 26s. a week.<sup>2</sup> In 1812 wages of sadlers had been amicably settled by a committee of the men meeting with the masters; both masters and men submitted books of rates; a balance was struck between the two. In "the winter after the late peace", "the masters asked a reduction when business was in a declining state, which was agreed to by the journeymen, with an understanding, that when trade got better, the masters should give the regulated price". This reduction had been agreed to willingly by the men.<sup>3</sup>

The cabinet-makers told a similar story

In 1801, there was a meeting of the journeymen and employers, and they agreed to a book of prices, and all the employers signed that book; by that book we worked until about the year 1816; I think it was in September 1816, from the depression of trade, we thought our employers ought to get some fall of the prices; we called a general meeting of the journeymen, and agreed to a reduction of 2s 6d in the pound on our prices.

<sup>1</sup> A master carpenter sat next to the recorder on the bench at the trial. Two men were imprisoned for twelve months and fined 20 marks each; three others were imprisoned for six months and fined 20 marks each. There had been no violence.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, testimony of Patrick Farrell, representing the Carpenters' Society, Dublin

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, evidence of Charles Graham, journeyman sadler of Dublin.

This society was aptly called "The Samaritan Society" After the reduction in 1816, which had cut down the weekly earnings of "an ordinary man" from about 1*l* 10*s.* to 20-24*s.*, there had been further reductions.

There were a number of men crept into the trade who were not reared to the business, and they brought in men not brought up to the business, who were willing to take any price they got; they became improved, having at times a good workman in the shop with them; and to bring all on a level, we adopted the London book, with a reduction of 4*s.* 2*d.* in the pound.

The witness did

not recollect the date, but we thought it better to regulate the trade by one price; we sent over to London and got the London book of prices; that book was framed by a committee of masters and journeymen in London, there was 1*s.* 8*d.* in the pound difference in the exchange; the employer that introduced it at first paid them for every pound in the book, 1*l* 1*s.* 8*d.* Irish money, but afterwards he took it off, and we were paid in Irish currency, and we afterwards allowed 2*s.* 6*d.* in the pound in reduction, so that we are working 4*s.* 2*d.* in the pound under the journeymen in London.<sup>1</sup>

Though the Irish unions were often in communication with corresponding unions in Great Britain, they almost invariably regulated their wage demands independently. For example, John Watkins, a licensed victualler, but formerly a journeyman hatter of London, categorically denied that the wages in Dublin were regulated by wages in London: "They have laws of their own equally with ours, with the exception as to prices given."<sup>2</sup>

Irish craftsmen, however, did not, for the most part, ex-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Christopher Leahy, journeyman cabinet-maker of Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153



pend useless energy in the mere fixing of wage-scales. They knew well enough that the danger lay in the competition of unskilled labourers — men, women, and children with no standard of living other than the wretched existence of the rack-rented Irish peasantry or the second generation of slum-dwellers. They usually endeavoured, therefore, to prevent the employment of men not members of their body, while refusing to admit to membership any who were not prepared to stand out for their conditions.

Certain unions, as the Society of Painters, and the supine Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers, allowed their men to work "at any place where they can get work".<sup>1</sup> In the vast majority of trades, however, the combinator added to the demands for limitation of apprentices and for payment of a minimum wage-rate the demand that masters should employ none but members of the body. Evidence to this effect was submitted to the Select Committee of 1824 in the cases of the carpenters,<sup>2</sup> cabinet-makers,<sup>3</sup> sadlers,<sup>4</sup> and woollen-manufacturers;<sup>5</sup> Mr Hall, who had often acted as solicitor for the men, regarded the employment of "irregular" and "obnoxious" men as one of the most fruitful causes of disputes in other trades as well.<sup>6</sup> In 1838, the book-binders,<sup>7</sup> printers,<sup>8</sup> sawyers,<sup>9</sup> plasterers,<sup>10</sup> shipwrights,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, 6310 and 6535

<sup>2</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, evidence of E. Carolan, Sr., Acheson Moore and Patrick Farrell

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, evidence of Christopher Leahy

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, evidence of Charles Graham

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, evidence of Obadiah Willans and Jeremiah Houghton

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp 460-470.

<sup>7</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, 4363-6

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 4127-8, 4680-2, but *cf* 5699-5700

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 3835-8, 4051-5, 5804-9

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 6114-7

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 5921

and calico-printers<sup>1</sup> were specifically added, both by masters and by men, to the 1824 list.

In general, union members were not allowed to work in shops or factories where non-union men were employed, on penalty of expulsion from the union. Membership in the unions was refused to men who had not served the regular apprenticeship in full, to men who were willing to work for lower rates of wages than those fixed by the unions, and, of course, to women.<sup>2</sup>

This stand on the part of Irish artisans has been represented as a narrow and selfish policy of attempting to create a monopoly of the labour market in order to compel employers to pay exorbitant wages to the members, irrespective of the quality of work they were capable of doing. Master after master complained to these Select Committees of the evils arising out of the necessity of paying equal wages to all their employees. As with the attitude of the journeymen to the taking of excessive numbers of apprentices, so the refusal to work with "irregular" men has been characterised as a gross injustice to the masses of the unemployed, committed in the interest of the comfort of a few.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. From the evidence of these same masters themselves, reenforced by the testimony of the workers, it is quite obvious that, had the masters been left a free hand by their men, the number of the unemployed would not have been reduced, the sole con-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 3107-3116

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Grimshaw, master calico-printer of Belfast, described an "act of violence" in this connection "The men of course were on the look out for them [the Scotch women he had engaged], and met them in Belfast, and I suppose treated them, very likely, and entertained them there a day or two, and paid their passage, and sent them off to Scotland, so that they would not allow those women to come out to the works at all." 1838 Report, *op cit*, 3160

sequence would have been the depression of the wages of those who were employed. Even Mr Fagan, who "often got five times the value of the money expended" in buying his "boys" a barrel of beer in the evening, and who professed himself "one of those that think that a good tradesman ought to be well-paid", acknowledged that, owing to the tremendous pressure of unemployment, men not in combination could be had on any terms; "I have, even for the miserable 10d. a day, received recommendations from large landed proprietors, begging employment for labourers."<sup>1</sup>

The assertion that masters were not allowed to pay more wages to their good workmen than to less competent men, and the assertion that masters were compelled to employ workmen whether they would or not are equally false. The master carpenters were particularly vociferous on this score. Edward Murray, Dublin architect and builder, testified in 1838

What I have often told them is, that I considered it a very hard rule among them, that the worst workman that ever took a tool into his hands should be paid the same as the best; that is the rule and regulation of the society. Now, what I proposed is, that I would give a man, if he was worth it, 40s a week, and pay every man according to his value, because now they are not encouraged to improve themselves, from the way they are paid.

Having turned off his body men and imported some Scotchmen, he had had the opportunity to put his ideal into practice, he paid the Scotchmen, according to their ability, from a minimum of 20s. to a maximum, not of 40s, but of 32s 6d.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, evidence of James Fagan, Esq

<sup>2</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Edward Murray, Esq. According to Garrett Murray, a foreman, such was the quality of Mr Ed Murray's workmen, despite his rejection of the body men as "inferior", that the portico of the court-house of Tullamore fell before the building was off

On the other hand, Benjamin Eaton, hereditary architect and builder, paid all his men 4s 8d a day. He always employed regular men, as had his father before him, they were the best workmen and the most satisfactory. He knew nothing about the rules of the society, and did not feel it necessary to do so. He had no objection to paying all his men equal wages, as he always selected good workmen.<sup>1</sup>

The answer to Mr. Murray's accusation, implicit in Mr. Eaton's testimony and in that of William Mackie, another Dublin builder,<sup>2</sup> becomes explicit in the testimony of James Kavanagh, secretary to the Dublin carpenters' society:

7909. Do all your members receive the same rate of wages?—  
They do, unless there cause shown why.

7910. What sort of a cause, if shown, would be admitted as an excuse for a violation of that general rule?—If a man labours under any inability, either in limbs, sight, age,

his hands (8199) Further light is shed on the reliability of Mr. E. Murray's assertions by his manner of explaining his prospective retirement from business in Dublin

"5884 Have you any other reason for that than the effect of the combination?—No particular reason, the business is reduced to that state that no man can live on it in Dublin

"5885 What has reduced it to that state?—I blame the employers for it more than the workmen, one is cutting against another so that no man is properly paid"

In this connection it is noteworthy that Edward Carolin, Jr, who had spent "enormous sums" in 1829 to "put [the men] down", gave "27s a week to the best men, and so downwards" (7548). The union demanded 4s 4d a day. In 1824, Edward Carolin, Sr, had been asked "Are the Committee to understand, that you can afford to pay a journeyman carpenter 4s 4d a day?" His reply was simply "I think the wages are quite little enough" (1824 Report, *op cit*, p 42)

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Benjamin Eaton, Esq

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, "7191 You say an inferior workman receives as high wages as a superior workman?—Yes 7192 Are they as regularly employed?—They must suffer a good deal, the employers will soon find it out and discharge them"

or want of talent, he would be allowed to work for a reasonable rate, whatever, in fact, he was worth.

- 7911 Do you admit that, generally speaking, all the members of your body are to receive the same rate of wages?—Generally speaking; but when it is shown it would be unjust, it is not insisted upon.
7912. Who is to decide upon the justice or injustice of the rate of wages?—It is decided in this way. The employer objects to his getting those wages, and then the men are asked if they consider him able to earn the wages, and if they see, truly and really, he is not, he is indulged to work for whatever may be considered fair.
7913. To what extent do you admit the opinion of your employers to influence your decision?—The employer, if he finds he does not answer, will put him away, and he will state what he considers his wages should be
7914. Do you interfere with the employer if he puts away a workman on the ground of his not being a good one?—No.
7915. In no instance have you done that as a body?—No.
- 7919 How do you justify the propriety of that rule?—We consider it would not be acting fair with either employers or journeymen to bind them up to the wages if there was any noticeable defect in them
- 7920 Do you think it unjust to the good workman if he is not to receive more wages than the bad one?—We do not hinder the employers giving what they like above the standard, but very few are generous enough to do that.
- 7921 But the way you work out the rule is this, that no man shall be employed under a certain rate; you do not object to more being given to a good workman?—Not at all
7922. Would any notice be taken by your society if a good workman was to do more at a certain rate of wages than a bad one could do?—No; for the men are anxious, from the scarcity of work and the shrewdness of their employers watching them closely, they are anxious to keep their employment, and strive which can do the

most; and it has been known that some men by their over-exertion have killed themselves, and the men have brought home work by stealth in order that they would have more done than others.

7923 Would they get any extra remuneration for that?—  
I never knew it done.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their willingness to permit a lower rate of remuneration to inferior workmen, the carpenters did not work with "colts"; the wage-rates of good workmen must not be depressed, except, as stated above, in case of a fall in the price of provisions and a decline in the state of the trade. There is in all this no attempt to force inferior workmen on any employer. Any master who wanted skilled carpenters must pay a certain minimum rate of wages—a rate which was admittedly "little enough";<sup>2</sup> he was perfectly free to dismiss inferior workmen and employ good ones in their place. On the other hand, any master who wanted to employ such inferior workmen could have their services for less than the trade-union rate. That is all the men insisted on.

Much evidence to the same effect is available in the Committee reports; one more instance must suffice here. Mr. P. D. Hardy has already been referred to as a Dublin master printer; the combination with which he had to deal was perhaps the most powerful in Ireland, owing to the perfection of the men's organisation and to the degree of skill requisite to the trade. The following excerpt from Mr. Hardy's testimony is therefore particularly valuable in substantiation of the preceding paragraphs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, cf also 1824 Report, *op cit*, pp 428 sq. The questioner was Lord Granville Somerset.

<sup>2</sup> 1824 Report, *op. cit*, p 427, evidence of E. Carolin, Esq.

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit* 4506-8 & 4519 put by Lord Granville Somerset, the rest by Lord Ashley, except 4518, put by Daniel O'Connell, the chairman.

4506. Have you ever attempted to discharge a bad workman whom you employed by the day?—Yes.
4507. Have you ever found any difficulty in that?—No.
4508. Is not that a practical remedy, then, by which you can choose your workmen?—No, I could not get in another; I had several such cases, men who were a great annoyance to me, their being in the office; but I could not get rid of them.
4509. Was it that a substitute would not have been suffered to come?—I do not know that it was; but sometimes they will not supply you with good hands.
4511. Do you mean to say that, supposing a man is employed by you at regular day work, and he is a bad workman, if you find him out to be a bad workman, and discharge him, does the confederacy, in any way, interfere in that discharge?—No, they do not.
4512. Is there any other difficulty, arising to you from the discharge, than the difficulty of getting a good workman in his place?—No
4513. Suppose a good workman comes to you to be hired in his place, would there be any opposition on the part of the confederacy?—If he belonged to the body, I do not think there would.
4514. You hear nothing more of the bad workman?—No.
4515. And the good workman would not be annoyed, to your knowledge?—No, if he belonged to the body.
4516. Then I understand that the body do not support bad workmen against good ones?—No, they do not.
4517. All that they insist upon is that you shall employ workmen who belong to their body?—Yes.
4518. Then why do you continue bad workmen in your employ?—Because we cannot get good ones.
4519. What is the difficulty of getting good workmen; is there not a sufficient supply?—It seems, if I keep them on year by year, there is a sufficient supply; but if I only keep on what I want from time to time, it is difficult to get them when I want them.

Despite their objections to working with "colts", "irregular men", or "strangers", as non-members of the combinations were variously styled, the men were by no means narrowly exclusive. They had no objection to working with any man, whatever his antecedents, provided he was proficient in his trade and willing to join their society. The rules governing admission to membership in the various societies varied somewhat with the trade; they will be treated in more detail in the next chapter. Suffice it here to state that, in general, the applicant for membership must have served the full term of the regular apprenticeship to his trade, and must agree to abide by the rules of the society. Men coming to Dublin from the country were usually required to pay a "penalty"; in some cases, English and Scotch journeymen were similarly subjected to payment of a fee for admission to the society.

It was the competition of the unskilled man, or of the man who was willing to accept any terms for the sake of the most meagre livelihood, against which Irish trade unionists sought to defend themselves.<sup>1</sup> They objected not at all to the competition of English and Scottish artisans, who, in fact, usually made common cause with the Irish combinator. Irish employers who had imported British workmen to replace their recalcitrant Irish employees admitted that only the most temporary relief was to be had from that practice. In 1824 Obadiah Willans, Dublin woollen manufacturer, nearly half of whose workmen were

<sup>1</sup> Cf. testimony of a master ironfounder and engineer—3rd Report of Irish Poor Commission (1836), *op cit*, p. 28c "Contractors for building houses hire all the different workmen; they are in the habit of sending in men for the inferior work, whom they pay at the rate of 10s. and 12s a week, many of them are not worth 2s. 6d, and in their accounts they charge for them as much as £1 8s and £1 10s. a-week. This is a chief reason why good workmen bred to a trade refuse to work with colts, . . ."



Englishmen, acknowledged that they were no cheaper than Irish; whether animated by patriotic pride or by rueful disillusionment, he testified, when questioned as to their relative expertness, that he had "as good Irishmen as Englishmen".<sup>1</sup> His fellow-manufacturer of woollens, Mr Houghton, of Celbridge, had not many English manufacturers; their wages were "precisely" the same as his Irish workmen were paid.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Carolin, redoubtable master carpenter and buidler, of Dublin, had in 1820 been deserted by twenty-five or thirty of his men in a body. From England and Scotland he had "got a sufficient number of good workmen". Though he had not paid their expenses from Scotland, he had paid them higher wages than his Irish employees. Notwithstanding this, they had all joined the association and turned out with the rest upon the renewal of the dispute. A fresh resort to Scotland had likewise given only temporary relief, for the new Scotchmen, too, had joined the body, though they were "not interfered with at all by the association".<sup>3</sup>

Similar testimony was given by the men themselves, and again in 1838 by both masters and men. Mr. Staunton, Dublin newspaper proprietor, had once made the "experiment" of employing Scotch printers, he had understood that he could get them cheaper and caused an advertisement to be put in a Scotch paper. Printers had come over in consequence, but had never come into his office. He had been given to understand that "they were induced to go off by the body, who paid their expenses back".<sup>4</sup> Corresponding difficulties were experienced by the country printers. Mr. Henderson, proprietor of the *Newry Commercial Tele-*

<sup>1</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, p. 286

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 288

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 422-425.

<sup>4</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, 4735-4737

*graph*, had engaged men in Belfast and Edinburgh to replace his striking employees; when they failed to come as expected, he "discovered, by inquiry, that men of that description had been in Newry, but had been obliged to leave the town without coming" to him. To the best of his knowledge the "intimidation" consisted in "giving them some money".<sup>1</sup>

Another provincial printer, Francis Dalzell Finlay, Esq., sole proprietor and editor of the Belfast *Northern Whig* and the *Reformer*, was a most determined man, a most resourceful man.

I had resolved [he testified] that I would not submit to the state of harassing, uneasiness, unpleasantness, and misery in which I was placed [in January 1838], by not having any control in my own establishment, and by my foremen being deprived of any control; and in fact I was not my own master in my own concern. I had resolved, I say, to put an end to it, or to give up the business. I had applied to several masters, at that time, to join me in two or three practical plans, which I laid before them, perfectly practicable, but they had not the nerve to attempt it. I wrote to country towns in the north of Ireland, to know whether I could get master printers to assist me in these practical plans. I had resolved, as I said before, to put an end to this state of misery and slavery, or to lock up my establishment; accordingly, thinking the master printers would not join me, I adopted rather a novel plan; and a plan which, I think, if acted upon by other employers, would free them from the miseries of combination upon many occasions. I fitted up privately, in the rear of my own premises, a printing office, unknown to my men, and known only to one or two confidential persons; I got a fount of types and put into it; I went to the country free schools, I brought in children from them, I put them into this secret printing office, I slept them upon the premises, I fed them upon the premises, and privately by night

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 5110-5113

took them out to give them exercise and air, and sent them into the country on Sunday, to take gymnastic exercises in my garden, at my own cottage. I attended to the business in the printing offices, and attended to the teaching of these boys myself; and by the time this strike came,<sup>1</sup> I had these little boys taught, some not more than ten years of age,<sup>2</sup> whom I perched upon stools, and thus set at defiance the threats of these mighty combinator.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the daring initiative and splendid resoluteness of this northern Whig, his attempt, in April 1834, to break the union<sup>4</sup> by importing replacements had ended in dismal

<sup>1</sup> The men had struck because he had dismissed one of them for voicing a complaint against the employment of a journeyman printer who was not a member of the union.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, "5344. Mr. Hindley) May I ask how many hours a day you employed these little boys you had of 10 years of age?—I think they began after their breakfast at 10 o'clock, and they used in winter to work to candle-light time; I then gave them books, and they amused themselves till bed-time, and began again the next morning, I did not conceive it was worth while to light candles while the boys were so young." "It is a very good thing for them, to clothe and feed them"—(5422)

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Francis Dalzell Finlay, Esq.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Finlay's outraged feelings, when he received a copy of the rules and regulations of the society, had made him "resolved to part with all the men in my establishment who dictated those rules and regulations; and I urged upon those men, for whom I had a high respect, to quit the body, and I would retain them in my employment". "5277. [O'Connell] What answer did you get from them?—That they could not accede to my request, one of them in particular, who held a responsible situation under me, and who had been between 9 and 10 years in my establishment, was urged to quit the union by friends of mine, who esteemed him on account of his attention in a particular department, the book and jobbing department, his reply was, that he regretted exceedingly that he could not remain, but that he must go in consequence of the dread of breaking with the union." "5286. *Chairman*. [Mr. Labouchere] When you say these workmen were influenced by dread in being induced to comply with the regulations of the union, do you apprehend that dread to have been a dread of personal violence, or a dread of forfeiting any advantages which,

failure    The tale is best told in Mr. Finlay's own words:<sup>1</sup>

I proceeded directly to Glasgow and Edinburgh to employ men; I engaged three men in Edinburgh, who entered into a written agreement with me, at the state of wages of my establishment, and according to the wages paid in Edinburgh. This agreement, when written out, was witnessed by respectable parties. They undertook to arrive in Belfast at a given day; a day which would have enabled me to put them to work by the time, or before the time, that the men were to quit my employment. I then came to Glasgow and succeeded in engaging another man; I brought him with me to Belfast, paid his expenses, gave him a certain sum of money, and put him into lodgings: when I went to look after him in his lodgings the next day, I found that he was gone, and by a letter which he wrote to his father in Glasgow afterwards, he stated that after I had left him in his lodgings, he was waited upon by a deputation of tradesmen, I cannot say whether printers or otherwise, who told him that he must not come into my employment, that it would not be safe for his person, and that he would not be employed in the trade elsewhere. They gave him a sum of money, put him on board a Liverpool vessel; and this communication he made from Liverpool, to his father in Glasgow. The three men I had engaged in Edinburgh; who arrived by a certain day, and who were under a written engagement, wrote to me, each man signing his own name, and stating that subsequently to my having engaged them, they had been waited upon by a committee of printers; that a deputy from Belfast had followed me to Glasgow and to Edinburgh; that every society

as workmen, they might have by continuing members of the union?—I considered it to be a dread of the loss of advantages which they supposed would result from a continuance with the union, and that they would not be able to obtain employment if they were to leave my establishment, as the men belonging to the union would not work in the same establishment with them."

<sup>1</sup> "It would come out better, if you will allow me to state continuously what took place after giving notice to quit"

had been written to throughout the United Kingdom, cautioning the men not to come to my employment; that they knew they were liable to be punished for breaking their engagement; but they were resolved to do it at all hazards, and they did not come. Upon finding I could not obtain these men from Edinburgh, I then communicated with some of my friends in Dublin, and, with a great deal of difficulty, I obtained certain journeymen from some of the establishments in Dublin. Deputies were sent from Belfast to Dublin; these men were waited upon and urged not to come, and one man, when he got upon the coach in Dublin, found the deputy sitting beside him, who, all the way to Belfast, urged upon him not to fulfil his engagement, telling him it would neither be safe for him personally, nor would he get employment elsewhere if he came to me; but he did come. When some of the men from Dublin came to me, there was a mob of I would say 2,000 people collected in the public streets of Belfast, in the vicinity of the coach-office; I had to get the police to guard the Dublin journeymen to my office; and to save them from personal violence when they got to my office, I had to get the police to stand at both ends of the street, and some of those men I had to take to my dwelling-house, to protect them there. Some of those men had to carry pistols, and I had to carry a sword-cane for my own defence for a considerable time; my office was mobbed; the men I had employed were pointed at in the streets, and after a great deal of difficulty, and going to law expenses, because Mr Hume's Bill had put it almost out of the power of an employer to convict his men; after considerable difficulty and great expense, I succeeded in convicting two journeymen printers at Belfast, and they were both sentenced to a month's imprisonment in the House of Correction at Belfast, and were kept to hard labour during that time<sup>1</sup> . . . I then got on very well,<sup>2</sup> independent

<sup>1</sup> They had "used intimidating threats"

<sup>2</sup> "With a good deal of difficulty, and at considerable pecuniary loss, by suspending my book and jobbing office, I at length succeeded in carrying on my newspaper, independent of the combinator altogether"

of the union altogether until the 15th September, 1836, or a few days after that. [The men imported from Dublin] and some others I had got from country towns . . . had in the meantime joined the union

Concluding that he was "not in a fit state to resist the combination", he had complied with its demands<sup>1</sup> until January 1838. Abandoning his earlier tactics, he had then adopted the "novel plan" outlined above. Six months later, he stated that, thanks to the free school children and to his wife "I have succeeded [in putting down the combination], and I believe I have assisted in enabling three or four or five other newspaper offices to do the same"

There is a quaint notion, widely prevalent, that dissensions between masters and men in Ireland have been and are embittered by differences of race and religion. The curious situation in latter-day Belfast, analysis of which is reserved for a later chapter, is possibly responsible for the conception that political and religious issues were at the bottom of many industrial disputes. Untenable as an explanation of the peculiar conditions under which organisations of workers labour in Belfast, the theory is ridiculous when applied elsewhere. Wherever the religious or political issue has been injected into disputes with labour, it has been done by employers well aware of the emotions to be excited among those who have exercised power over Ireland—the people by whom Henry VIII is remembered as "Defender of the Faith" and his daughter as "Bloody Mary".

In the previous chapter have been noted the petition of the Corporation of Glovers and Skinners, Dublin, and the counter-petition of the Skinners of Dublin, Non-freemen. This dispute of 1780 is infused with a highly modern spirit, but a spirit which has migrated from Dublin to Belfast.

<sup>1</sup> "I sent off the two apprentices, though I have no doubt I laid myself open to an action by the parents of those two apprentices."

The Protestant masters cloaked their attempt to injure business rivals under the mantle of religion<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that these same Protestant masters had acted with the Catholic masters in dealing with their workmen.

By an Irish statute of 1793 (33 Geo III, c. 21, sect. 7),<sup>2</sup> membership in Irish guilds had been thrown open to Catholics. By the Act of 1780<sup>3</sup> Catholics and Protestants alike were legally free to take as many apprentices as they saw fit, irrespective of the creed of the apprentices. Nor was any religious discrimination practiced by the trade unions. Neither admission to membership in the trade societies, nor disputes with employers were influenced by sectarian considerations.

Daniel O'Connell, conducting the investigation of 1838, made a special point of ascertaining whether the "confederacies of tradesmen" had any "colour of the political or

<sup>1</sup> This threadbare garb, used to cover so many sins, is only too well known to the student of Irish political history. The legend of the "Pope's Brass Band" and the cant phrase "Home Rule means Rome Rule" are familiar, even to modern ears. Cf. the chapter "Rome and Ireland" in Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (London and New York, 1904) and W. P. Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island*, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> "An Act for the Relief of His Majesty's Popish, or Roman Catholick Subjects of Ireland." This Act, conceded by Grattan's Parliament in a session when even the principle of parliamentary reform was unanimously asserted by the Irish House of Commons, was, however, accompanied by a Militia Bill (33 Geo III, c. 22), a Gunpowder Act (33 Geo III, c. 2), and "An Act to prevent the Election or Appointment of unlawful Assemblies, under Pretence of preparing or presenting public Petitions, or other Addresses to His Majesty, or the Parliament" (33 Geo. III, c. 29).

<sup>3</sup> 19 & 20 Geo III, c. 19. But note that the Bounty Act of 1785 (25 Geo III, c. 48—cf. *supra*, Ch II, p. 53) provided for payment by the Government of apprentice fees "to such tradesmen or manufacturers as shall take children from the Charter Schools, or from the Foundling Hospital, in the city of Dublin..." (sect. 11), "Provided always, that every such child with whom any fee shall be given out of the said sum of four thousand pounds shall be apprenticed out to protestant tradesmen or manufacturers only" (sect. 12).

religious dissensions in Ireland". Masters and men, Catholics and Protestants, were agreed that there were "men of every religious persuasion amongst them".<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hardy, a "Protestant Dissenter",—and a sturdy one—testified: "The best workman I have is a Roman-catholic; the man I give most wages to; and I consider he deserves it." Again, "I do not think there is any feeling in the trade confederacy of Dublin that is connected either with politics or religion."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Staunton, proprietor of the *Daily Morning Register* and contemner of the "most unfounded" Malthusian theory, was a Catholic whose foreman was a Protestant. Yet he agreed with Mr. Hardy, that in the combination there were "not the least" "of those political or religious distinctions which prevail in Ireland".<sup>3</sup> On the men's side, Thomas Daly, secretary to the Dublin printers' union, a Catholic employed on "the high Orange newspaper" [the *Evening Mail*] agreed that there was "nothing whatever" "in these combinations or unions in the slightest degree mixed up with differences of politics or religion". The proprietors treated him as though he were just "as good a Protestant as themselves"; "I do not think they make any distinction with their workmen"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1838 Report, *op cit*, c. g, 4346 *et seq*

<sup>2</sup> "4351 And have your own politics tolerably strong?—I have, and express them, though I never meddle much in politics, but I have my religious feelings" "4352 But whatever your politics are, you and I have the misfortune not to agree?—We do not, but I make no difference with regard to my men"

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op. cit*, evidence of Michael Staunton, Esq

<sup>4</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*, Evidence of Thomas Daly. An exception is the evidence of one witness, Robert Regin, of the Dublin painters' society, who, though testifying that "there is no difference made in the society between Protestant and Catholic", charged that certain Protestant masters "will employ no person but persons of their own religious principles while they are idle" These masters employed both body men and colts



Even Mr. Ed. Murray, member of the Dublin corporation, who put in evidence letters threatening him as a "Bloody Hanovarian that voted for Colly West and Hamilton",<sup>1</sup> asserted that there was "nothing at all political" in the disputes between him and his workmen.

There is only one other suggestion of politics in connection with a trade society. This was supplied by Luke Seery, secretary of the extraordinary organisation styled the Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers. "The committee of men belonging to a cemetery, the Glasneven burial-ground" "have employed a vast number of men, and excluded many members of our society from employment because we had not funds to assist in the election" of Daniel O'Connell as Member of Parliament for Dublin. Even in this case it was acknowledged that, "in general", the employers did not show any preference to the Old Body of Bricklayers. Indeed, the members of this rival society were paid better wages.<sup>2</sup>

Most suggestive of all is the testimony of Mr. Finlay, proprietor of the *Northern Whig*. In this gentleman's remarks may clearly be seen the characteristic attitude of Belfast capitalists to-day. The *Northern Whig* and the *Ulster Times* differed very strongly in political opinions.<sup>3</sup> "On account of its [the *Times*] political principles", Mr. Finlay would "be glad not only to extinguish that journal in Belfast, but all journals of the same principles in the United Kingdom". Notwithstanding, "I did all I could to enable the *Ulster Times* to resist the efforts of the combinators,

<sup>1</sup> "You Corporation Gluttons yer gunns and baynots wont save yer, we have the souldiers with us, and the Queen, and King Dan himself. long life to them (signed) Bloody Hands"

<sup>2</sup> "6517 Mr. O'Connell) And so these burial men commit this outrage upon the bricklayers of Dublin, that they pay higher wages than the other society would accept, is it not so?—It is so"

<sup>3</sup> "We differ as widely as it is possible to imagine."

and they acknowledged publicly they chiefly owed to me their success". Of course, in the combination "there was nothing political whatever". The concert of employers (Mr Finlay would not have it called a combination) had thought it "desirable to encourage competition amongst the operatives".<sup>1</sup>

One curious society, the Welters, was generally regarded by the masters as a trade society, composed of unskilled labourers; many acts of violence were attributed to it. Mr. Fagan "never heard that it had [a political character at all]; they are all of the lower class of people, which is, generally speaking, of the one religion, the Catholics, but I never knew of any political circumstance occurring with reference to it". Garrett Murray, foreman of a firm of carpenters, agreed in attributing cases of violence to this organisation. But he did not think it had anything to do with maintaining the regulations of the trade, or punishing those who did not conform to them "I think it was some political thing; something in the nature of ribbonism."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the three major issues in dispute between masters and men—limitation on the taking of apprentices, fixation of a minimum wage, and employment of union men—a number of quarrels arose on other points. Piece-work was, of course, banned by the rules of most of the trades.<sup>3</sup> Introduction of new machinery was rarely a source of trouble.<sup>4</sup> Occasionally the unions attempted to regulate the

<sup>1</sup> 1838 Report, *op cit*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also evidence of Wm. Darcy, plasterer "They were [very much afraid of the Welters], but I have no recollection of the Welters being in any way connected with trades, it was some other system, not at all connected with trade, in my opinion"

<sup>3</sup> Some employers, notably the carpenters (1838 Report, 7399), would not permit piece-work in any case

<sup>4</sup> Many employers felt that the saving in wages would be eaten up by the interest on the capital expended in installing the machinery and by the cost of upkeep. Cf the testimony of James Campbell, Belfast flax-spinner (*ibid*, 3040-5)

hours of labour; thus, Peter Connary, house-painter and decorator in Dublin, stated that his men were fined by their society for working over-time; the men were allowed to work "from six in the morning to six in the evening, with one hour for breakfast and another for dinner".<sup>1</sup>

The method of paying wages frequently caused complaint. Consequent on the change in the currency in 1826, there were disputes in many trades "Though the employers reduced the wages of the workmen, the trades people did not reduce the price of provisions to the workmen"—at least, "not in a fair ratio".<sup>2</sup> Payment in public-houses was all too frequent a practice. Some firms were alleged to pay their men regularly in bad coins. Luke Seery, the bricklayer already referred to, complained that though Mr. Guinness was "most highly respectable", the clerks of this "great porter brewer" habitually included in his wages about 2s. a week in counterfeit coppers. He had complained to Mr. Guinness, "and all the redress I got, was to bring back the paper that contained the coppers, and the name of those who gave the coppers, and it would be stopped from them. . . ? I have not got paid"<sup>3</sup> William Darcy, secretary of the Plasterers' Society, stated "the points upon which the masters and men are at variance" as follows:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 6839-6840 More often it was the masters who were arbitrary about the hours. According to Wm Darcy, plasterer, "He [Mr. Roberts, a builder] had a clerk that used to mind the men's time in going in and out, and I considered it a very harsh thing that a man would be returned back and lose a quarter of a day for being merely four or five minutes beyond his three-quarters of an hour at breakfast, and the man proposed that he would work during his dinner hour, he would give that time if he would be allowed, and he was not allowed to work his dinner-hour for that five minutes".

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 6979, evidence of Peter Connary. This master was himself complained of as one whose men never got their wages in full on a Saturday night (6343)

<sup>3</sup> 1838 Report, *op. cit.*; Guinness' representative attended to deny the charge (6994).

They take every advantage of the workingmen; in the first instance, some of them employ them and promise to pay them the regular rate of wages; some of them will probably at a very unreasonable hour of the Saturday night, bordering on Sunday morning, give them a trifling portion of their wages, putting them off till the next week, and that next week would probably never arrive; and in many instances I have suffered myself from the conduct of the employers, and I have been disappointed in getting what I expected, and sometimes I have been paid in copper money, and that of a very inferior description; I would not get for 5s. worth of it a penny loaf; some of the griping or needy employers would make a practice when they get gold or good paper, of going to the flour merchant or people of this description that gather large quantities of copper money, and exchanging it for copper money; there is a discount allowed of 1s. or 1s. 6d. in the pound for this exchange; and the men are very often at a loss by getting bad halfpence; they are tied up in bundles, 5s. or 10s. bundles, and if you offer to return it you will not be wanted again, but they will not tell you that it is on that account that you are discharged

He did "not know" that the legal remedy for recovering wages was "very expeditious"; from his own experience he did not regard it so "The magistrates that preside in the Court of Conscience are generally employers, and the men have not great confidence in them, though they may be as honest as possible."<sup>1</sup>

Trucking was productive of serious complaint. From a mass of depositions submitted to O'Connell's committee in 1838, one must suffice:

Says that he worked in Mr. Mackay's employment in 1830 as an apprentice to his father, William M'Cormac; he says, he recollects taking from Mr. Mackay's pay-table tea, sugar, a

<sup>1</sup> As for the Lord Mayor's Court, "the Lord Mayor is an employer; he is an extensive builder, and the buildings that the lord mayor is getting done now are no great benefit to the city".

bottle of whiskey, and a fine-toothed comb, in part payment of wages; he says that on the same occasion he saw on Mr. Mackay's pay-table piles of tea, sugar, and bottles, which he supposed contained whiskey, and that he saw several of the men take a portion of each of those during the time he was present; he further states, he knew his father frequently to bring home these commodities from Mr Mackay's employment; and on one occasion, when he brought home a fine-toothed comb, for which there was stopped 10d., his mother said she could get as good a one for 2½d.,—It will, of course, be a question for the Legislature which of the two, the fine-toothed comb or the whiskey bottle would have the best effect upon the head of an Irishman <sup>1</sup>

It must not be inferred from the foregoing exposition of the aims and objects of Irish trade unionists that they were organised exclusively, or even primarily, for trade purposes. Most of them originated as, and continued to be, mortality societies "to support the men when sick, and bury them when they die".<sup>2</sup> Widows and orphans received benefits as well as invalids and corpses. Yet support of unemployed members seems to have constituted the heaviest drain on their finances; in the absence of any Poor Law, Irish workers were under the necessity, even more than British workers, of providing relief for financially disabled comrades. "In a great measure, the poor keep the poor."<sup>3</sup> "The poor here entirely support the poor."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 7974-5

<sup>2</sup> 1824 Report, *op cit*, p 446 Cf operative sadlers' evidence, Irish Poor Commission, *op cit*, p 54c "The object is to provide for the sick, and the burial of the dead; and the effect proposed has been obtained"

<sup>3</sup> Irish Poor Commission (1836), *op cit*, p 29c., evidence of house smiths, operatives

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 32c; evidence of a master plumber. He continues "It is contrary to fact to assert that the poor of Ireland are idle, the avidity

To sum up, Irish trade unionism was but part and parcel of British trade unionism. The social philosophy of organised labour in Great Britain was the social philosophy of organised labour in Ireland. The rules and regulations of the Irish combinators were conceived in the same spirit as those of the British; the specific demands of Irish artisans varied from those of English and Scottish artisans no more than the demands of London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow men differed from one another. If O'Connell justly condemned "the unsocial and oppressive monopolies for which the Irish trades had long been notorious",<sup>1</sup> British trade unionism must equally be condemned. If, on the other hand, O'Connell was merely "clever" in condemning "the well-established methods of trade-unionism",<sup>1</sup> his strictures on Irish trade unionism must equally be discounted. "As a rule, wherever we find exceptional aggression and violence on the part of the operatives we discover exceptional tyranny on the side of the employers"<sup>2</sup> Dublin is not the exception that proves the rule. It is high time to admit that what is sauce for the English goose should also be sauce for the Irish gander.

with which they apply for work is incredible. From want of occupation they must be vagrants, the rich will not support them, not being compelled to do so." Cf also evidence of a master ironfounder and engineer (*ibid*, p 28c): "If I were ground to powder I would be for a poor tax, the men now legislate for themselves because the Legislature will not do it for them. If the dispositions of the masters were as honest as those of the men, it would be better for Ireland."

<sup>1</sup> S. & B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 ed.), p. 171

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 165

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY IRISH TRADE UNIONISM. ORGANISATION AND CHARACTER

"THE Dublin trades, then [1824] the best organised in the kingdom, ruthlessly enforced their bye-laws for the regulation of their respective industries, and formed a joint committee, the so-called 'Board of Green Cloth', whose dictates became the terror of the employers"<sup>1</sup> "At this time [1838] the trade societies of Dublin and Cork had caused serious complaint by attempting to establish, and not without violence, an effective monopoly in certain skilled industries."<sup>2</sup>

Before entering on the subject of the "Board of Green Cloth", it is desirable to discuss the organisation of the individual trades. Except for Dublin, combinations were rarely permanent organisations in Ireland. In general, workmen were able to organise only sporadically in Belfast and the other lesser towns of Ireland. Their wages were not sufficient to permit them to maintain unions capable of surviving a struggle with a determined master-manufacturer. The prevalence of the domestic system added to the difficulties in the way of combination. Above all, in the absence of a well-established system of apprenticeship, the vast body of the unemployed was an insuperable obstacle to the success of trade unionism. The printers, for reasons already indicated, formed the principal exception to this.

<sup>1</sup> S & B Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 ed.), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171. Given such a name, Irish trade unionism needs but the rope wherewith to be hanged. But, for the "violent and exclusive spirit" of these "monopolies", see the preceding chapter.

general rule Both in Dublin, and in the rest of Ireland, the number of unions fluctuated, the membership figures in the several trades varied still more widely from time to time.

The various Dublin trades were separately organised. Each trade had its own governing body and its own rules and regulations. As there was a marked similarity between the various organisations, their structure and functioning may be sketched in a general outline that will apply to all. The members of each union elected a committee of delegates which was entrusted with the collection and expenditure of funds, negotiations with employers, and all other administrative affairs. The decisions of this executive committee were submitted to the general body at regular meetings of the tradesmen. Oaths of secrecy were generally abandoned after the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824-5.

The Dublin societies seem usually to have levied a fixed sum weekly on their members; in emergencies, however, the men contributed additional amounts. Fines imposed on members for violation of union rules, and fees exacted from certain categories of new members, were irregular sources of revenue. A few societies were able to build up a "trade fund"; the majority, however, were always short of funds. To save money, meetings were held in public-houses; a few pence per head spent for porter was sufficient recompense for the landlord. In crises, therefore, recourse was had to loans from other societies, either in the same trade in other towns or in other trades of Dublin.

Obviously, the activities of the unions must be conditioned by their financial strength. The Printers' Society of Dublin, whose objects were stated to be "the formation of a permanent fund for affording relief to those who may be out of employment from time to time, to settle the price of labour between the employers and employed, and other matters affecting the general welfare of the printing community",



seems to have been by far the strongest of the Irish unions.<sup>1</sup> In the four years, 1834 to 1837, this union had paid out the sum of £1161<sup>2</sup> 14s. 10½*d*. This amount was distributed as follows: to persons out of employment £724-8s-7½*d*.; to 120 emigrants £329-16s-3*d*.; to "tramps" £44-10s.; for burial of members £63. The society paid unemployed members 7/6 a week for the first six weeks, and 5s. for the next seven weeks, or £4 a year. This does not include strike pay, there had been no disputes in the printing trade in Dublin. Liberal grants were made to emigrants, and to the wife or other representative of deceased members.<sup>3</sup> Travellers on the "tramp" were allowed 5s. on production of their union card; failing to find employment in Dublin, they were sent into the next town<sup>4</sup>.

The carpenters seem to have ranked second only to the printers in power. They had an elaborate system of rules and of fines on members for their infringement. Some of these, as put in evidence in 1824, were Rule 15—"Any member or members of this community holding out in opposition so that his shopmates are obliged to turn out against him or them, shall be fined the sum of £1-14s.-3*d*.; and that any member belonging to this community that replaces any member or members on the turnout shall be fined £3-8s.-3*d*."; Rule 22—"Any man turning out for non-payment of his wages, shall not be replaced by any man under the fine

<sup>1</sup> This society had been formed in 1825, because, having been "compelled to make a public appeal" for funds to support their unemployed, the printers "were so hurt at being obliged to make a public appeal, that they determined to avoid it in future." In 1838 they were strong enough to pay their secretary twenty guineas annually, yet they, too, had recourse to a public-house for committee meetings.

<sup>2</sup> Incorrectly given as £1261

<sup>3</sup> Emigrants to the New World were allowed £8, emigrants to the next world £3.

<sup>4</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, 5473-5660

of £1-2s-9d.”; Rule 11—“That any member of the council of five known to be intoxicated shall be fined from 5s to £1—as the majority of the field may think proper.”<sup>1</sup> In 1838, the society was stated to have a membership of “about 500”, the men regularly paid 1s a week into the funds; extra levies were imposed when the committee thought it necessary.<sup>2</sup>

The carpenters’ ample funds permitted them to engage in ambitious undertakings

The principal objects of the society are to apprentice the orphans; we assist the widows, we bury the dead, and assist our distressed members, and we support by regular combination a fair rate of wages for our labour. We have built an asylum for our aged and infirm, and we intend to establish a practical school for our youth, as our employers have never taken it into consideration.

The amount of relief afforded to “distressed members” varied according to the state of the society’s finances. In 1838, by means of an extra levy on their members, they had been able to pay applicants 5s a week. “We would not give any relief to a man who lost his employment by intoxication or any bad conduct.” In 1820 eight carpenters had been imprisoned in consequence of a “riot”; the society had borne the expenses of the defence and had supported them while in prison at a rate “something near their

<sup>1</sup> 1824 Report, pp. 428-439. evidence of Acheson Moore and Patrick Farrell, on behalf of the carpenters’ society. Mr Farrell had known “a good many” instances of enforcement of this last rule. In 1838, James Kavanagh, then secretary of the society, was further questioned about the minor rules and fines. Though admitting that several harsh rules were on the books, he denied that they were enforced; “we are far better than our rules; they appear in some measure tyrannical, and they will be given up, we consider them too tight”. 1838 Report, 8043

<sup>2</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, 7821-8132. The secretary received £25 a year.

wages”<sup>1</sup> Although at the time of the O’Connell Select Committee the carpenters were “very much distressed”, owing to the want of business and the consequent appalling want of employment, the society was committed to a highly ambitious project. Like other societies, the carpenters were “obliged to meet in public-houses”; to “escape that odium thrown upon” them, they were building a house containing a large room for public meetings. It was their hope to use the premises for a “mechanics’ institute”. The necessary funds were raised by subscription<sup>2</sup>

The weaker societies, financially unable to use their funds for so many diverse purposes, were constrained to confine their activities within narrower limits. Some, such as the Halifax Society, were little more than benefit societies. The Halifax Society, as the Dublin saddlers styled their organisation, collected 1s-1½d. a week from 80 members. The bulk of the sum was devoted to the support of the sick and the burying of the dead. Only 2d a week out of each man’s contribution was “laid by to assist men in distress when out of work”.<sup>3</sup> Still more extreme is the case of the Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers.<sup>4</sup> Its objects were given by the secretary as “to afford permanent relief to its members in case of sickness or accident, and for the decent interment of the dead”. In trade disputes, the secretary did not think the combination had been “successful in

<sup>1</sup> At that time the dues were 10d. a month, and the membership 400 to 500. To meet a temporary deficit sums were borrowed from other trades, “we pay them again punctually”.

<sup>2</sup> They had already expended £700, and calculated that it would cost £200 or £300 more to finish it. The subscription had been started in 1832; “the building was commenced in 1836, and in less than a year we had it roofed in”.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, pp 446-454.

<sup>4</sup> This British union was in competition with the local “Old Body of Bricklayers”, Report of 1838 Committee, 6465-6586

any instance" In fact, he did "not see that it does any good at present"<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, some societies, like the Samaritan Society, as the Dublin cabinet-makers somewhat misleadingly called their organisation, existed exclusively for trade purposes.<sup>2</sup> This society was too preoccupied with its dual desire "to protect our trade against the masters, and also to protect the masters against the imposition of unprincipled journeymen" to extend its charity to widows and orphans "Wounded soldiers"—to apply Davitt's phrase to trade unionists imprisoned for combination—were, however, cared for when in prison; four cabinet-makers, convicted in 1822, had been allowed £1-5s a week by the society

"The violent and exclusive spirit which animated the Irish Unions" is, perhaps, nowhere better exposed than in the light of the rules governing admission to the Dublin trade societies The limitations on the taking of apprentices and the insistence on the employment of none but body men have been treated in the preceding chapter. It remains only to determine whether the rules governing admission to the unions were narrowly selfish and conceived in the spirit of establishing an unsocial monopoly Examination of the evidence of masters and men shows that any skilled workman, "of good character", was readily admitted to the Dublin societies, other than a slight and perfectly justifiable preference to men who had served their apprenticeship in Dublin,<sup>3</sup> there was no discrimination exercised against candidates for admission

<sup>1</sup> "It is our earnest wish to prevent" the payment of members at public-houses, but "it is not in the power of the society to prevent" it "What steps did the society take in consequence [of the reduction of wages]?—None It is not in their power to take any steps"

"Is it a benefit society?—It is not a benefit society; they assemble merely for the purposes of trade" Report of 1824 Committee, pp 454-459

<sup>3</sup> Such men had paid higher apprenticeship fees, and had had better opportunity to acquire skill

The case of the Dublin printers' union is typical. The way in which a journeyman was admitted to membership was thus described:

As soon as a Dublin apprentice terminates his term, he is proposed by one person as a fit person to become a member of the society and his indentures are handed in; he then remains upon the book of the society till his name goes round all the different printing establishments in Dublin, to know if he is a person of good character, and qualified to be admitted. If the majority are in his favour, he comes forward and pays a guinea, and then every week he is employed he subscribes sixpence towards the general expenses of the society.

"Persons from the country pay something higher and remain a longer time out of the benefits of the society." As for a man who had served his apprenticeship in England, the witness "did not think he would be admitted at all, except by being proposed and coming in as a new member", in such case, he would be charged two guineas, and remain twelve months without the benefits of the society. If, however, the applicant from across the Channel produced a card to show that he was a member of a union there, he would be admitted into the Dublin society on payment of a fee of 17s 6d only<sup>1</sup>. According to Mr. Hardy, the confederacy in no way protected the sons of members more than they did any other party.<sup>2</sup>

The carpenters' rules, as put in evidence in 1838, appear, on superficial consideration, truly selfish and unsocially exclusive. While men who had served their seven years' apprenticeship in Dublin itself were eligible to admission on payment of a fee of 13s, country apprentices were required

<sup>1</sup> This advantage to Scotch boys over Irish, as O'Connell put it, had not, however, brought more than 8 or 10 Scotchmen to Dublin. Report of 1838 Committee, 5461-5645.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 4406-4407

to pay seven guineas      Colts, that is, men who had not served their apprenticeship, and journeymen who did not belong to the society, could not be admitted except on payment of ten guineas. Moreover, no Dublin union carpenter was permitted to take an apprentice unless the boy was a close relative. It appears, however, that these severe rules had been only recently adopted,<sup>1</sup> in response to the pressure of hard times. The building business in Dublin fell off heavily after the Union.<sup>2</sup> Even in 1824, there were 600 or 800 carpenters in Dublin; within the memory of Mr. Patrick Farrell, testifying in that year, there had been 1500 regular carpenters, to say nothing of colts. Owing to the decline of the trade, the men had emigrated to England or America. By 1838, conditions growing worse, the carpenters had been induced to pass the rules given above in a desperate effort to secure for their own children at least, "the means of being reared up to the trade". The secretary of the union, testifying in 1838, was under no illusion as to the power of combination to restore prosperity to the Dublin building trade; he felt it necessary, however, to protect the

<sup>1</sup> In 1824, the carpenters admitted not only those who had served their apprenticeship, but where men had "improved themselves by working a considerable time in Dublin, it is considered a benefit for the trade they should be admitted". The fee was "sometimes two guineas, sometimes they raise it, though seldom more than that"

<sup>2</sup> "I have in my possession a paper, a report that was got up by the carpenters in 1828, and they state, 'The public works alone carried on in Dublin before the Union by the Government boards gave employment to above 2,000 carpenters,—at that time there were upwards of 2,300 employed in the buildings in public squares, streets, etc., without including the number employed in breweries, distilleries, and sugar bakeries, and other large establishments flourishing in Dublin. Now there is no such thing, the Liberty, where the manufactures were carried on, is all in ruins" 1838 Report, *op. cit.*, Evidence of James Kavanagh. An appalling picture of industrial Dublin in 1836 is painted in the testimony collected by Messrs. Francis Diggen & D G Lobe, Assistant Poor Commissioners, assigned to investigate combination in Dublin. *Cf. infra*, pp. 119 *et seq*

men as far as possible against the evil effects of the slump "If there was a resident nobility and Parliament in Dublin the prices of buildings would never stop the erection. . . . But the less buildings that are going on the oftener we are idle, which requires us to have the more wages, because provisions and house-rent are never a bit the cheaper." Accepting O'Connell's premise that there was a fixed amount of capital to be laid out in the wages of the carpenters of Dublin, he arrived at the conclusion that the men's object must be so to limit their numbers that they might receive out of that capital what they considered a fair proportion, as respectable members of society.<sup>1</sup>

Some societies, including the house-painters and bricklayers, framed their admission rules in such fashion as to increase their value as employment agencies. The house-painters admitted Dublin apprentices for a fee of two guineas, scaled down to those who could not afford so high a premium; they rejected only apprentices who were not properly bound and such as were "of bad character". It was, said their representative, very difficult to gain admittance into the society. "The principal thing we look to is the man's honesty, as we give security to the employer for the honesty of our members." For immoral or disorderly conduct men were expelled from the society.<sup>2</sup> The bricklayers also professed to "look to character" in admitting men; though they did not consider themselves in any respect responsible for the good conduct of their members they expelled from the society any whom they knew "to aid or assist in any illegal strife".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, pp 428-439, and Report of 1838 Committee, 7821-8132.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, evidence of Robert Regin, especially 6305, 6307, 6400, and 6376

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Luke Seery, esp 6529, 6533, 6530

In short, the spirit of Irish trade unionism was no more selfishly exclusive than that of trade unionism in Great Britain. In certain instances, under the pressure of particularly intolerable conditions, a Dublin trade might draw up demands which to a superficial investigator might seem unjustifiable. So might, and so did, many of the trade societies in Great Britain as well. But taken by and large, the Irish trades were no more immoderate, no more inconsiderate, and no more pernicious than were their British congeners.

It has already been stated that the Dublin trades were individually organised. Consideration of their interrelations has been, thus far, deferred. These relations may best be considered in three aspects: (1) the interconnections of the Dublin unions with the Irish provincial unions; (2) the intra-trade connections of Irish unions with British unions; and (3) the inter-trade connections of the several societies.

As has been stated above, combinations were confined almost entirely to Dublin. Where local trade societies did exist, they seem usually to have been in more or less regular correspondence with the society of their trade in Dublin. A few trades had actual organic connections throughout the island. Thus, the local societies of printers were combined into the Irish Typographical Union. The rules of this union were framed by a meeting of delegates from the four provinces which took place in Dublin on the 15th of September, 1836. The field of activity of the I T U extended from Cork to Derry. Membership in a local printers' society brought membership in the general union, "as matter of course." Rule 12 of the Belfast Typographical Society, as amended 18th January, 1837, read: "That no person can be a member of this society unless becoming a member of the Irish Typographical Union. No member of the profession to be admitted into the union but through the medium of



the society." From the headquarters of the general union in Dublin, about £100 had been sent to Belfast to assist the local society there in the quarrel with the *Northern Whig*; about £90 had been sent to Newry for the struggle against the proprietor of the *Newry Commercial Telegraph*. No money had been sent to Cork except to "two men that had lost their situations, who, according to the rule were entitled to it". Money had been sent to Waterford "to give travelling expenses to men that were turned out of their situations". In this case, the general union existed not as a mere clearing house for financial assistance to a needy local society from the other societies in the same trade, it framed the rules and regulations to be observed in the printing trade throughout Ireland. Of course, as Matthew Ryan, secretary to the general union, testified in 1838, it "neither could nor would attempt to oblige any man to leave his situation"; under the Act of 1825 such an attempt would have been illegal. But, "it was understood that if they [the members of a local society] did not comply with the rules [of the general union] they could not belong to the society any longer"<sup>1</sup>

Again, Acheson Moore, a working employer belonging to the Carpenters' Society, testified in 1824 that the affairs of the society, between the assembling of the quarterly "fields", were conducted by a Council of Five; these committeemen were chosen "one from each of the three provinces [Ulster, Munster, and Connaught], and two from the province of Leinster".<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Grimshaw, master calico-printer of Whitehouse, near Belfast, complained of a union in his trade. His men had not allowed him to employ any who could not produce

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, evidence of F. D. Finlay, Thomas Daly, H. Courtney, and Matthew Ryan, esp. 5372, 5625, 5350, 5682, 5684, 5694

<sup>2</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, p. 429.

a union card. This card was issued in the name of the journeymen calico-printers of the "North of Ireland District". He conceived that this association included none but cotton-printers<sup>1</sup>

The Dublin hatters had a "charitable fund . . . to which each pays 3*d.* weekly for the relief of the aged and infirm, who have belonged to the trade". They were "in the habit of supporting applicants from all parts of Ireland". Unlike the printers, they did not, however, attempt to regulate their trade outside Dublin.<sup>2</sup>

The glovers of Dublin had no connection other than with the glovers in Cork<sup>3</sup>

The organisation of the woollen trade is of peculiar interest in that it has given rise to the picturesque legend of the redoubtable Board of Green Cloth. This body, which has since been represented as a joint committee of the Dublin trades, was, in 1824, thus described:

One or two delegates from every *woollen* factory, will assemble at some inn, where they have a green cloth upon the table, and paper and pens, and ink, and proceed in their business with great regularity; they summon from my factory, or any other factory, offending persons; and if those persons have been guilty of any violation of the laws of the institution or association, they are fined a pound, or some other sum, according to the nature of the offence.

In case of a strike or turn-out at any particular factory, the men were supported by the operatives in other factories. For example, Mr. Houghton's men had sent from Celbridge to the striking employees of Mr. Willans in Dublin "20 *l.* 30 *l.* and even 40 *l.* per week". The woollen operatives

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, 3111, and Appendix, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Irish Poor Law Commission, 1836, p. 26c

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51c.

avoided strikes in all factories simultaneously, as it was necessary for some men to be employed in order to be able to contribute to the support of those men who were unemployed.<sup>1</sup>

The intra-trade connections among the various local societies in Ireland were of precisely the same nature as the connections among local societies throughout the United Kingdom. The physical reasons arising out of the geography of the British Isles, rather than any racial, national, or religious differences, account for the rise of all-Ireland unions, distinct from the corresponding British organisations. In 1824, sailing vessels were still regularly employed on the cross-Channel service; even with the tardy introduction of steamers, it remained, owing to the more rapid development of rail communication, easier to develop separate organisations on either side of the Irish Sea than to combine all local societies, British and Irish, into one general association. Hand in hand with the improvements in methods of transportation went the perfection of kingdom-wide trade-union organisation. In the early part of the century, however, few of the Irish trades had yet become intimately involved in the ramifications of British trade unionism; rarely was there any organic connection, though frequently the Dublin trades were in more or less regular correspondence with England and Scotland.

Alexander Richmond, who, "first as an operative, afterwards as a manufacturer, commission agent and merchant", had had "a very general acquaintance with all the manufacturing districts of Scotland; a good deal in England, and, in Ireland, for upwards of twenty years", stated that a number of combinations "are in regular correspondence with London; the cabinet-makers, for instance, the upholsterers, and the boot and shoe trade, are connected over all

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, evidence of Jeremiah Houghton, Esq

the kingdom" To the question, "This is the same sort of combination as exists between London and Manchester, and any other place, in other trades?" he replied, "Yes; Ireland is in the same general combination, only they sometimes vary in their prices"<sup>1</sup> This evidence was confirmed before the Irish Poor Commission in 1836<sup>2</sup>

Four other trades were added to this list by the evidence of Michael Farrell, chief constable at the head police office, Dublin The only societies which he knew to be connected by correspondence with the English clubs were the iron moulders and foundry men, curriers, hatters, and thickset cutlers He described a system of passes by which "a man comes to a town, and gets his night's lodging, and his day's support, and as much as carries him on to the next town, if he cannot get employment there" Passes from England were good in Ireland, provided the bearer did not call at the same place oftener than once in six months Passes from Ireland were good in England<sup>3</sup>

The hatters maintained a widespread correspondence for the purposes of finding work for their unemployed and of financial assistance in cases of strikes or lockouts

There is a benefit union established throughout the three kingdoms of Ireland, England, and Scotland, which enables all those out of work to be assisted with 1s 4d. per day Each man travelling has a pass-book and a ticket to show he belongs to the trade, and, on producing them, he is relieved at *every town* he comes to Out of 5,000 journeymen, which is the whole amount in the three kingdoms, there is an average of 500

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, evidence of J. Alex. Richmond, esp. pp 59, 60, 72

<sup>2</sup> The operative boot and shoe makers asserted that "the journeymen are in connexion with no less than *thirty-nine different trades extending throughout Great Britain, France and Germany*" Poor Commission (1836), *op cit*, p 8c

<sup>3</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, pp 295 and 296

always on the tramp, who receive 9s 4d. weekly from the fund. This system has entirely arisen out of the abuses practiced in the poor-law management in England . . . We have weekly returns, by which we can ascertain where every journeyman is employed in the three kingdoms <sup>1</sup> . . . London is the place where we receive all information, and they know the list of prices for every town in the three kingdoms; and when there is any manufacturer in any little town of England, Ireland, or Scotland, who wishes to reduce his wages, information is given to London, and they request an immediate answer to know what they are to do; they strike immediately for wages, and they receive support from London and other places until such time as they receive that for which they strike

Though their regulations were uniform throughout the three kingdoms, "each local committee for a district fixes the prices of work in that district". The association used its system of communication to enforce its fines. The local societies were kept informed of all delinquencies, and co-operated in the punishment of refractory men <sup>2</sup>

The printers testified in 1838 to the existence of similar arrangements in their trade. The general secretary's correspondence with Glasgow, unlike his correspondence with

<sup>1</sup> Report of Irish Poor Law Commission, 1836, p. 26c. A hatter on the tramp carried cards to show "that he has been employed in a factory, and that he has paid all which is due, and that he has left his work in a fair honest way with his employers; he produces that at the next town he comes to where there is a factory, if that is found regular, he receives according to the town sixpence or a shilling, or whatever it may be; he asks for employment, and if refused, he goes on to the next town, and this protects him throughout his journey". Report of 1824 Committee, p. 153

<sup>2</sup> "If any man is discovered in purloining ever so small a portion of the stuff intrusted to him, he is fined £5 5s by the regulations of his own body, and if any man, who is on the tramp, is discovered asking alms, he is fined £1. 1s; . . . If any man leaves his employer, without having finished his work, he is fined £2 12s 6d." Report of Irish Poor Law Commission, p. 27c

the Irish locals, was occasional and "a discretionary matter". Thomas Daly, secretary of the local Society of Printers, Dublin, gave more explicit testimony. The printers endeavoured to extend their union over all Ireland, and to get men in every town to abide by its regulations, but "we have nothing to do with the local regulations of either Scotland or England". None the less "our cards are recognised in England: I think in contesting for a principle, if we solicited their assistance, we should have it". Though the Irish and British printers had nothing to do with each other's internal relations and had no pecuniary combinations, yet in all questions involving the interests of the trade, they acted as much in unison as they could. In short, their object was to create a real and complete union such as the hatters seem to have had <sup>1</sup>

In some few cases, there were in Dublin two rival societies in the same trade. In addition to the regular body of carpenters, there was in 1838 a separate body, connected with the General Society of Carpenters in Great Britain and Ireland. The masters do not seem to have realised the distinction, though they understood that "the present union of carpenters is much more general and connected with other countries and trades; before, they belonged to the city of Dublin". The secretary of the regular society admitted that there were a large number of men "calling themselves carpenters".<sup>2</sup> In the case of the bricklayers, too, the local body or "Old Body of Bricklayers", seems to have been more powerful than its British rival, the Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers.<sup>3</sup>

Two instances are recorded in which the connection be-

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, evidence of Thomas Daly, esp 5671, 5521, 5522, 5536, 5539, 5540, 5541, 5542-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, esp 6415, 7090, 8052-3

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6501-6509

tween English and Irish societies had been severed. "There was a union between the pipe-makers of England and Ireland, but it was dissolved owing to so many going over there, and the English now will not work with us."<sup>1</sup> "The clubs in Liverpool were united with our club here. We were driven over there so frequently for employment, they got tired of paying a share of our expenses, and have now set their faces against *our going over there*, and will not work with us."<sup>2</sup>

On the score of inter-trade organisation, Dublin trade unionism of the eighteen-twenties has received much unmerited praise in the strictures passed upon it. It is asserted that a joint committee of the Dublin trades, known as the Board of Green Cloth, was able ruthlessly to enforce its dictates on the Dublin employers. Attention has already been called to the fact that the "Board of Green Cloth" was nothing more than a joint committee of the woollen trade. Although there were several descriptions of woollen operatives, representation on the joint committee is alleged to have been on a factory basis, not on a craft basis. This joint committee of operatives from the several woollen factories has been confounded with the mythical "union of trades". It is true that Mr. Houghton in his testimony before the committee in 1824, when speaking of the Board of Green Cloth, added, "and I believe a union and combination of the trades".<sup>3</sup> On being further questioned as to whether this union embraced all trades, Mr. Houghton was compelled to confess ignorance of conditions in any trade but his own, that is, the woollen trade. His allegation as to the "union of trades" was not borne out by the testimony of any other witness before this committee, mas-

<sup>1</sup> Report of Irish Poor Law Commission, 1836, p. 32c.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34c.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, p. 290.

ter, policeman, or operative Constable Farrell denied that there was in Dublin any regular union of trades There was a private understanding; "they frequently lend money to other trades that are in want of it".<sup>1</sup>

Inasmuch as the several trade societies of Dublin had similar interests, it is not surprising that individual unions frequently rendered financial assistance to other unions.<sup>2</sup> This was the full extent of the "union of trades". As Mr. Moore, working employer, representing the Dublin carpenters' society, said in 1824, there was no general union of trades subsisting in Dublin, "except borrowing money".<sup>3</sup> Several specific instances of such monetary assistance were related to Mr. Hume's Select Committee When the wool-len operatives had struck against Mr Houghton, they received "a considerable sum, I believe a hundred pounds at once, from the paper makers in Dublin".<sup>4</sup> A statement of the carpenters' accounts seized by the Dublin police was put in evidence by Edward Carolan, Sr, master-builder He explained an item of £27 8s 9d., entered as "subscription received as a loan", as amounts received from other trades; he thought they had been received in small sums from 1s. 8d. upwards.<sup>5</sup> Acheson Moore, working employer, acknowledged that he might have loaned money Patrick Farrell mentioned that loans from the paper stainers, slaters, painters, and tailors had been recently repaid "When we are short of money, we are obliged to borrow from other trades; they lend us ten or twenty pounds, and we pay them again punctually".<sup>6</sup> The Dublin cabinet-makers had given

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p 292

<sup>2</sup> Allusion has already been made to the practice of borrowing money from other unions in times of crisis

<sup>3</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, p 439

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 289

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p 426

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 436-7.



a little assistance to the Dublin hatters, who had forwarded it to London where there was a prosecution<sup>1</sup>

Despite this practice of lending money, the Dublin trades were not strong enough, even had they been sufficiently class-conscious, to maintain any sort of inter-trade organisation. Charles Graham, of the Dublin saddlers' society, had "heard men say such a thing would be for their interest, but it never took place"<sup>2</sup>

The nearest approach to a "Union of Trades" was the "aggregate" meeting. Such a meeting had been held by the Dublin trades to draft their petition to Parliament. Eighty-four delegates, two from each of forty-two trades,<sup>3</sup> had attended that meeting. Such a meeting had been held twice before in the memory of Mr. Moore; on both occasions, "it was some bill before Parliament which gave rise to it". On one of these occasions, about 1789, fifteen or twenty thousand men had marched in procession with wands in their hands from the Phoenix Park out to College Green, to protest against a bill before the Irish House of Commons<sup>4</sup> "Mr Foster, the speaker, came out, as I have heard, and told them the bill should not pass, and the bill did not pass." Charles Graham, saddler, had been present at another "meeting of the deputies, about nine or ten years since, when Serjeant Onslow got the Act of the 5th

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Mr Moore: "I do not know how many trades there are in Dublin, there are a great number that belong to the woollen trade, in the different branches, and there were four from the hatters, there were two descriptions of hatters", p. 431.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Farrell did not know what bill it was, but he had heard that it was "to reduce their wages, and that they should get discharges from their employers as if they were servants; that they should bring characters with them when they left their employers; they thought that more oppressive than reducing their wages". 1824 Report, p. 432

of Elizabeth repealed". Mr. Graham himself had been deputed to attend the sessions of the 1824 Committee "by the trades generally in Dublin", on the above-mentioned occasion, when eighty-four delegates from forty-two trades had met to petition Parliament.

The Combination Laws lay heavy over the men. Even this general gathering had "had to give notice to the police magistrates every day we met for forwarding the present petition".<sup>1</sup>

In 1836 and 1838, when the men had infinitely less reason than in 1824 to make a secret of their organisation, there is no suggestion of any joint committee of the Dublin trades. The masters, as well as the men, denied its existence. Mr. Fagan had heard of its existence, but he did not know; the acts he complained of had been committed by particular unions. Mr. Hardy did not know of any connection between the printers and other trade unions of Dublin; he did not believe they had any. Mr. Mackie spoke of "a general combination", but denied that he meant "a general union of the whole trades". He believed that the slaters and carpenters were quite distinct. His fellow-builder, Mr. Eaton, denied positively that all the building trades were combined in one body.<sup>2</sup> The men were equally positive in affirming that the several trades were independently organised.<sup>3</sup>

Though the Dublin trades had no joint committee, their friendly assistance was not confined to money loans. According to Mr. Hall, solicitor, "if the men cannot accomplish their purpose, they are generally attended with acts of

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, pp 431, 452, 446

<sup>2</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, 4078, 4081, 7075, 7077, 7078, 7667.

<sup>3</sup> In some cases, there were even distinct unions for subdivisions of the same trade, the hatters, for instance, were divided into the "wool-body" and the "stuff-body". Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op cit*, p 25c.

violence, more or less; one trade will take up the cause of the other" He explained that, "to evade discovery and consequent punishment", they had adopted the practice of having offenders against union rules punished, not by members of their own trade, but by unemployed men of other trades. Constable Michael Farrell gave similar testimony; the tailors usually perpetrated any acts of violence as "they are a numerous body, and more unemployed, and therefore more ready to be had".<sup>1</sup>

To complain of the violence of Irish trade unionists while condoning the violence of British trade unionists, is somewhat unfair. In Dublin, the rich reek and sordid squalor of whose wretched slums can hardly be matched anywhere in the United Kingdom, not excepting even Glasgow, the absence of violence would have been extraordinary.

The condition of Dublin in 1836 may best be described in the restrained language of the Commissioners for inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland. They state that "there can be but one conclusion drawn from the evidence, namely, that for a considerable period the numbers of poor who have dragged out a miserable existence in a state of frightful destitution, has been most lamentably great"<sup>2</sup> A typical deposition runs as follows:

I have been about ten years a member of the committee of the Mendicity Association, and have resided in Dublin, or its vicinity, for the last twenty-eight years, during all which time I have taken a great interest in the state of the poor, and have for some years been a zealous advocate for the necessity of a compulsory provision for the poor. I was born and resided in England until the year 1806. Upon my first coming to Ireland I was struck with the miserable condition of the people compared with what I had been accustomed to observe in England.

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1824 Committee, pp 461 and 292

<sup>2</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op cit.*, p 101

During the last twenty years I have been in the habit of visiting the poor at their own abodes. I think that at the present moment there are 7,000 aged and impotent poor in Dublin wholly unable to earn any honest livelihood from age, infirmity, or sickness. I think that there are, at least, 10,000 more who are able to obtain a livelihood, but who, from want of employment, are in a state of distress, and whose precarious earnings are preyed upon by the class below them. If to these are added their children, who are brought up in rags and idleness, I consider that there are not less than 30,000 to 35,000 destitute poor, requiring the interference of the Legislature to provide them with the means of subsistence.

I have recently visited the abodes of many poor families on the books of the Mendicity who were reported to be sick by the apothecary. I found the whole in the most deplorable state of destitution. I went upstairs into a ruinous house, No 2, Fordham's-alley; upon knocking at the door of the back-room, first-floor, it was some time before I could gain admittance; at last the door was opened by a young woman, quite ragged, when I saw a very old woman apparently seventy or eighty years of age, sitting on straw, without a blanket or any bed-clothes, and hardly any covering on her person, and not a vestige of furniture in the room. The girl told me that the old woman, by name Fanny Duffy, was her mother; that she and another girl, who was in the room, were her daughters; that her mother received a weekly allowance of 1s. 1d per week from the Mendicity, 1s of which was paid for the use of the room in which they were lodgers. I ascertained from a boy who lived near the house, that one of the daughters formerly earned something by selling some small articles in a basket on the street, and that they had then possessed some little furniture; but everything was swept away by the landlord of the room for rent. I did not ascertain what the mother or other daughter had been; the room was about 15 feet square; the door and windows all smashed and a horrible smell pervaded the whole place.

I went a few yards from that place to No. 58, Coombe, when I inquired for James Nugent, who was reported to be confined with a tumour in the axilla, in a very dirty room and house, with numerous other mendicants, without bed-clothes. The woman with whom he lodged came downstairs to the shop, at the bottom of the house, which was occupied as a dairy. She told me that he was in a corner of the room up-stairs, and unable to stir; that he complained of being hurt breaking stones at the Mendicity; that he was allowed 6*d* a week, and that he owed her 1*s*. 6*d*. for rent, and she knew not what to do with him. I also visited on the same day Mary Carleton, at No. 2, Skinner's-alley, who was reported bedridden. I found her in the front room on the first floor. She told me, and I think from her appearance correctly, that she was nearly 100 years of age. The room was very clean, although there were five or six pallets for stray lodgers; she rented the room. I found likewise there a daughter, who slept with her; they were allowed 1*s* a-week by the Mendicity; the daughter said she earned something occasionally as a charwoman whenever she could; but that during the whole of the week, previously, her earnings were 5*d*. The size of the room was about 15 feet square.

The three cases I have cited were selected casually from a list of 72 returned by the apothecary as extern sick, and I have no reason to doubt that the only variance in the others would be found to be the disease<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Dublin, though the chief market-town of a prosperous agricultural country, exempt from recurrent famine and famine-fever.

<sup>1</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op cit*, pp 102-3. Evidence of Mr Howell, *cf* also *ibid*, p 104, "Lodging for the Poor", *e g*, "Mr. Barnes likewise says, 'I have seen 18 or 20 persons in a room about 12 or 13 feet square. I have heard of as great a number as 30 persons being in one room. The principal person who takes such a room pays for it about 1*s* 10*d* a-week, and lets the corners for 5*d*. each to four families, sometimes as low as 3*d* , sometimes they have a horse-cloth, or piece of old carpet, or straw'"

Dr Stoker says, "I have been connected with the different medical institutions of the city of Dublin for the last 35 years, and physician to the Cork-street Fever Hospital for the last 31 years, during which time I have had great opportunities of becoming acquainted with the condition of the poor, which have led to conviction in my mind that a great part of the disease of the poor is attributable to their want of proper food. As an instance of it, during the year 1819 there was a very severe epidemic in Dublin, and a large amount of subscriptions was raised, and great part of it expended in the purchase of food, and immediately the violence and extent of fever diminished; as soon as these funds were exhausted, and the poor were again driven to their own resources, it again commenced spreading. The progress of this fever has been gradually increasing in malignity; . . . ."

Mr. Abraham Palmer, 11 years surgeon to Mercer's Hospital, says, "An immense quantity of disease exists among the poor from the bad diet and bad clothing, and bad lodging of the poor; the children likewise, are subject to many diseases from their feeding on raw vegetables and other most unwholesome food, being in the immediate vicinity of two of the largest markets in the district. The diseases of the poor proceeding from these causes tend very much to the shortening of life."<sup>1</sup>

The Assistant Commissioners thought that "It would be most needlessly lengthening this Report to dwell for any considerable time upon the evidence which has been given as to the diminished means of obtaining profitable employment, with which the poor have had in latter years to contend". On the fact of widespread unemployment there was no disagreement. Among the reasons assigned for this

<sup>1</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, p. 105 (Diseases of the Poor), *cf.* also evidence of officers of the Society for the Relief of Sick and Indigent Room-keepers (Actual Condition of the Poor, p. 103); "I do think it probable that 100 persons, and upwards, annually, may die in Dublin, of starvation", "upon visiting the poor at their own lodgings, I have often found them literally naked"

condition are the panic of 1825, the withdrawal of the protecting duties, the competition of English factories, and "the increasing absence of persons capable of giving employment".<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, no charge in this connection was at this point in the inquiry brought against combinations of workmen

Another portion of the inquiry devoted to "Combination" summarizes the evidence of several employers and of a minister of the Gospel as follows:

Upon the whole, the evidence taken by the Assistant Commissioners establishes the fact that combination does exist amongst the workmen in Dublin, and has done so for a long period to a considerable extent,—that it has reduced many families to want,—but that the distress which is stated to have greatly increased in latter years cannot be attributed, except in a very limited degree, to this cause.<sup>2</sup>

Passing over "the comparative price of the necessities of life for the poor, and the comparative wages of labour, in the same trades or occupations at different periods", the Assistant Commissioners addressed themselves to matters which they deemed more relevant.

Of all the subjects connected with the state of the poor, there is none so deeply interesting as an inquiry into their moral condition. The want of employment, of which such universal complaint is made, must, of necessity, induce idleness, from whence springs almost every other evil to a country. Amongst a people for whom no sufficient remunerative employment is to be found, all cannot long withstand the temptations which surround them to commence a course of vice and profligacy, and at last, losing all desire to obtain an honest livelihood, to engage in

<sup>1</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, pp 105-106 (State of Employment for the Poor)

<sup>2</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op cit*, p 115

those vagrant habits which disgrace this unhappy country, and form the perpetual record, not merely of the vices of its unfortunate inhabitants, but of the folly of the higher orders in omitting to have recourse to every expedient to provide them with the means of obtaining a sustenance by honest industry. The gentlemen who have favoured the Assistant Commissioners with their evidence on the subject of the moral condition of the poor seem rather to have confined their observations to their moral character; for, that their moral condition is below that standard which ought to characterize the lower orders of every nation, it is to be feared, is merely asserting in other words that they are poorer. But the evidence at the same time leads to the conclusion, that the faults of the lower orders of Irish are faults of circumstance, not of character, and that naturally they are as much inclined to industry and honesty, and have as great a regard for integrity, as the more fortunate inhabitants of the sister kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

"The evidence . . . tends to prove," the Assistant Commissioners conclude, "that the number of persons occupying the lowest class in society is lamentably great,—that their condition is most deplorable,—that the sources from which alone they can hope for relief are liable to be contracted from prejudice or caprice,—that their means of obtaining a livelihood are inadequate, and exposed to the risk of being almost annihilated from combination,—that their morals are continually endangered by the temptations to the abuse of ardent spirits,—and that this latter cause, combined with a want of proper food and lodging, and sufficient fuel and clothing, brings many to a death at least premature. Yet begging is a crime, vagrancy a transportable offence, and an escape from prison, and from the rigour of such penal enactments, is a capital felony. . . . It is too much the custom to accuse the lower orders in Ireland of an

<sup>1</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op cit*, p. 107.



utter disregard of all moral and social duties: the Assistant Commissioners have received no evidence to induce them to agree to any such sweeping condemnation. The vices of the lower orders ever attract public attention, — they protrude themselves before the public notice, while their virtues neither meet with the reward, nor their distresses with the sympathy, of those who would make the faults of the few the pretext for their closing the avenues of their hearts against the wants of the many.”<sup>1</sup>

In the language of the Report’s summary of the medical evidence, “Such is the nature of the evidence as given by these highly respectable gentlemen in their own very words; observation or comment can add nothing to its force”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op. cit.*, pp 118-119

<sup>2</sup> Poor Law Commission, 1836, *op. cit.*, p 105

## CHAPTER V

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY NATIONALISM

SCHOLASTIC philosophers, anxious to employ Hellenic philosophy in the service of Christian theology, developed the concept of implicit Christianity. Men who had lived and died some centuries before Christ's earthly existence could hardly be explicit Christians, yet their minds were so attuned to the truth that they became Christians by implication. In like fashion, modern Irish Socialists, not content with the teachings of their own apostles, have sought to implicate Nationalists of bygone days. On the basis of the doctrine that "the cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland and the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour", the United Irishmen, the Young Irelanders, and the Fenians have been claimed as champions of the cause of Labour. Less perspicacious enthusiasts have attempted to add the Irish Volunteers, the Repealers, and the Home Rulers to this galaxy of implicit Socialists. The relation of Sinn Féin to Labour is reserved for more extended discussion in a subsequent chapter.

It is indeed difficult to picture Grattan and Flood—to say nothing of their forerunners—as friends of Labour. Whatever reasons may be assigned for the decay of Irish trade and Irish industries after the Union (or after the exile to St. Helena), there can be no doubt about the social philosophy of the patriots. In a preceding chapter has been noted the character of the social legislation of "Grattan's Parliament": no relaxation of the laws against combinations of workmen—only a slight increase of mercy toward combinatorians who repented of their crime; no protection for the wage-earner that was not dictated by the interests of

the employers. Whatever the hopes of the rank and file of the Volunteers, their leaders, whose title to the name of Nationalists is not above dispute, may be summarily dismissed from consideration as friends of Labour

The United Irishmen, and Robert Emmet in particular, deserve more attention. Beginning with the Catholic Committee of 1791, the leaders of this non-sectarian revolutionary movement speedily covered Ireland, but particularly the Belfast area, with a network of secret societies. The Society of United Irishmen had connection with similar secret societies scattered throughout Great Britain. Their principles were those of their contemporaries, the French revolutionaries, with whose ardour they were fired. Their heroes were the Jacobins, but Thermidor nowise dampened their enthusiasm. Political, religious, and economic liberty, equality of all men in the eyes of the law, and the brotherhood of the Irish nation — so far and no farther did the United Irishmen go

Nor, indeed, could they well have been expected to foresee that the rigid application of their liberal principles, coinciding as it did with the effects of the Industrial Revolution, must necessarily destroy that very equality for which Wolfe Tone huzzaed so lustily. United Irishmen were not, and could not be, socialists or in any way uplifters of the industrial proletariat. Babeuf was not canonized by them. It was to the Directory that these Irish nationalists looked for sympathy and assistance. That vast and respectable class, the men of no property, of whose rights Tone constituted himself the advocate, must be understood, not as the then non-existent urban proletariat, but as the peasantry of Ireland, struggling then, as ever, against the evils of landlordism in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The movement that culminated in '98

<sup>1</sup> The fact that the artisans threw themselves wholeheartedly into the revolutionary movement is not sufficient to give it a proletarian colour, these artisans were not, prior to the Industrial Revolution, "men of no

was a middle-class and peasant movement, closely similar to the French Revolution itself. It was a revolt against the oppression and misgovernment of Ireland by a foreign executive and a native Parliament owned by the foreign-minded Irish landlord class. Had it succeeded, there is every probability that the working class, despite their contributions to the struggle, would have been excluded from any share in the government—under the denomination of “passive citizens” or otherwise—and subjected, in the name of liberty, to the operation of the inevitable, inscrutable, and inexorable natural laws then being discovered. Just as combinations of workmen were prohibited in the United Kingdom and in France, in order that natural law might the more rapidly produce wealth for the nation—in the shape of its backbone, the middle class—so would they have been by an Irish middle-class Parliament, infused with precisely the same principles.

One thing Ireland might have been spared, had the United Irishmen succeeded, viz., the perpetuation of the ecclesiastico-political issue in Belfast. More and earlier progress might have been made, in a united and autonomous Ireland, toward combating the fratricidal strife which facilitates the ruthless exploitation of Irish workers and so permits a populous community inhabiting a fertile island to be so notoriously poverty-stricken. There is much sound philosophy, however roughly expressed, in a poem by Jamie Hope, a Belfast artisan and ardent United Irishman:

“Arrah Paddies my hearties, have done wid your parties,  
 Let min of all creeds and professions agree  
 If orange and green min, no longer were seen, min  
 Och naboclish, how asey ould Erin we’d free.”<sup>1</sup>

property” The parallel of the French Revolution, and the support given by the Paris artisans to bourgeois revolutionary leaders should be borne in mind.

<sup>1</sup> J. Connolly (ed.), *Ninety-eight Readings: Being a series of reprints of the most important literature current in Ireland 100 years ago* (Dublin, 1898), no. 4, p. 52.

Here was a creed far more significant for Ireland than the festive gesture of Lord Edward Fitzgerald in renouncing his title.

Robert Emmet, hero of the abortive attempt on Dublin Castle in 1803, aroused the enthusiasm of the workers in a degree even greater than did any of the men of '98. There is a story current in Ireland, which need not be taken too literally, but which adequately expresses the emotions aroused amongst the working class by Robert Emmet's martyrdom. About 1820, when Kingstown Harbour was in process of construction, a track was built up Killiney Hill, on which granite was to be brought down in trucks. A number of geologists seeking specimens gravitated to the Killiney quarries. One day one of these geologists became absorbed in examining a specimen he had discovered between the rails, unmindful of a descending truck loaded with granite. The driver was, however, sufficiently alert and dexterous to stop his truck. When the workmen at Kingstown learned the details of the incident, they immediately struck work in a body. The men refused to resume work until the driver had been dismissed. It developed that the geologist, whose life had been so narrowly saved by the promptitude of the driver, was none other than Major Sirr, the British officer who had effected the capture of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and, later, of Robert Emmet.

It has, however, often been the case that a man commanding the whole-hearted sympathy and enthusiastic support of the working class has not been a whole-hearted advocate of the interests of that class. In this case, as in the case of so many other patriots, the appeal to the workers was a nationalist appeal—the cry for the liberation of the Irish nation from the control of the government of another nation. That such control had wrought infinite misery to the bulk of the Irish people was undeniable, but equally undeniable

that certain sections of this people had in their own private interests connived at that foreign control; equally undeniable, too, that a mere transferral of power from the ruling class of England to the corresponding class in Ireland would be a mere transferral of the Irish people from the frying-pan to the fire. No nationalist, however idealistic his nationalism, unless cognisant of and prepared to cope with this difficulty, can be truly reckoned among the champions of the workers in their struggle for sufficient and wholesome food, decent housing facilities, and the ability to enjoy even the simplest of the benefits of our modern social organisation. In view of these considerations, the United Irishmen, despite their relative democracy and their spirited nationalism, must be dismissed from consideration as prophets of the cause of Labour.

These remarks are most clearly illustrated in the career of Daniel O'Connell. "The Liberator" has been variously characterised as "the first truly great leader the Celtic people have found since the death of Owen Roe O'Neill"<sup>1</sup> and as "a sworn dastard and forsworn traitor",<sup>2</sup> but it will not for a moment be suggested that he was a champion of the working classes or even that he "fought strenuously against landlordism".<sup>3</sup> Daniel O'Connell, born of a small landed family of ancient lineage, had had a most conservative training; throughout his life he was unable to shake off the conviction that revolutionary methods were immoral and sinful, that parliamentary action was the only permissible course. His experiences as a student at Catholic colleges in France from 1791 to January 1793 were not of a nature

<sup>1</sup> Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, *op cit*, p. 35

<sup>2</sup> Lalor, letter to Charles Gavan Duffy, editor of the *Nation*, in Fogarty, *James Finian Lalor, Patriot and Political Essayist (1807-1849)* (Dublin and London, 1918), p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Davitt, *op cit*, p. 35

to infuse an ardent young Catholic with any enthusiasm for the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> "It is alleged that on entering [the Channel packet] at Calais the future demagogue plucked the symbol of the French republic, the tricolor, from his hat and trampled or threw it into the water."<sup>2</sup> His horror was immeasurably deepened by the calm pride of a young fellow-Irishman, who displayed a handkerchief he had soaked in the blood of Louis XVI.<sup>3</sup> Returning to Dublin in 1797, O'Connell (then only twenty-three years of age) fell in with United Irish circles, though out of sympathy with the method of violent revolution.<sup>4</sup> In the spring of '98 O'Connell was admitted to the bar; immediately afterwards he entered the "Lawyers' Yeomanry Corps". "This corps contained many United Irishmen, and he felt apprehensive lest some of the black crawlers, then prowling about in every direction in search of human prey, should pounce upon and implicate him in treasonable proceedings. He accordingly quitted Dublin in the June of 1798"<sup>5</sup> "It would appear probable that O'Connell remained in the peaceful wilds of Kerry during the most eventful period of the Rebellion"<sup>6</sup> That O'Connell's first public speech, at the Royal Exchange, January 13, 1800, was made in opposition to the Union

<sup>1</sup> It is related that O'Connell and his fellow-students lived in terror of their lives passing French soldiery were accustomed to threaten "les jeunes Jesuites, les Capucins, les recolets" Daunt, *Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1867), vol 1, p 35

<sup>2</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, I, pp 36-7.

<sup>3</sup> One of the brothers Sheares, whose corpses are still on exhibition in the vaults of St Michan's, Dublin Cf [Owen-Madden], *Ireland and its Rulers* (London, 1844), pp 14-15

<sup>4</sup> "The political leaders of the period could not conceive such a thing as a perfectly open and above-board political machinery . I was myself a United Irishman" O'Connell, quoted in Daunt, *op cit*, I, p 41

<sup>5</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, I, p 42

<sup>6</sup> Cusack, *The Liberator His Life and Times* (n d), I, p. 179

may easily be over-emphasised; the resolutions to which he was speaking had been pronounced innocuous by Major Sirr himself<sup>1</sup>. At the time of the Emmet rising, O'Connell, still a member of the Lawyers' Corps, turned out on sentry duty with the rest of Major Sirr's forces. In after years he was wont to point out a house he had searched for pikes<sup>2</sup>.

Nor did O'Connell ever develop into a true Irish Nationalist.<sup>3</sup> Sheil, O'Connell's chief lieutenant, bitterly resented a remark by Lord Lyndhurst that the Irish were "aliens in blood, in religion, and in language"; "I own myself to be astonished that Arthur Duke of Wellington did not start up and exclaim 'Hold! I have seen those aliens do their duty!'"<sup>4</sup> O'Connell offended even his own followers by his declaration, *re* Coercion, in 1833 that

I have ever been and still am most attached to a British connexion! . . . Yes, as long as I saw the utility of the connexion, and an immense utility may exist, I should prefer seeing this House doing justice to my countrymen, rather than it should be done by a local legislature. . . . If I thought that the machinery of the present government would work well for Ireland, there never lived a man more ready to facilitate its movements than I am. The only reason I have for being a Repealer is the injustice of the present government towards my country<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The text of these resolutions is given in Cusack, *op cit*, I, pp 233-234 "Major Sirr read them with apparent attention, then jerking them on the table said, 'There is no harm in them'" Daunt, *op cit*, I, p 54

<sup>2</sup> To help a friend, he had voluntarily done guard-duty for double the number of nights required. Cf Daunt, *op cit*, I, p 86 and Cusack, *op cit*, I, pp 267-268

<sup>3</sup> "His loyalty to the Sovereign was very warm, and not unfrequently showed itself in language of almost Oriental servility" Lecky, *Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland* (New York, 1872), p 277

<sup>4</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, II, p 595

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, II, p 557



In view of his early training and experiences, and in the era of reaction in which he began his political career, O'Connell could not fairly be expected to have developed into a thorough Nationalist. It is rather to the credit of his courage and initiative that he pushed the Repeal agitation so far as he did. Yet the fact that he did so is to be regretted. However insistently O'Connell, the Catholic Agitator, might asseverate that he was a Catholic, not a Papist, however emphatically he might proclaim that he would as soon take his politics from Constantinople as from Rome, Catholic Emancipation effected through the efforts of the founder of the Repeal Movement, left to Ireland a sad legacy. The apparent identification in Ireland of politics and religion was to bear bitter fruit in the "Pope's Brass Band" and in present-day Belfast. However beneficial to Ireland at large Catholic Emancipation and the Tithe War may have been, it was a dire misfortune to permit them to become associated in the popular mind on both sides of the water with even so weak a measure of nationalism as inspired Repeal.

To describe O'Connell as a friend of Labour would be absurd<sup>1</sup>. Even one who characterises him as "Irish to the very marrow of his bones", and asserts that "Ireland has never produced a greater man than O'Connell, and Europe very few that can truly be called his equal . . .", admits that "he cannot be classed among those who have fought strenuously against landlordism"<sup>2</sup>. Infinitely less did he fight against capitalism. O'Connell fully accepted the nat-

<sup>1</sup> " . . . , although he often used very violent and very unjustifiable language towards individual landlords, he never encouraged those socialistic notions about land which since his death have been so prevalent; and he never forgave Arthur O'Connor [uncle of Feargus] for having, as he heard, a plan for the equal division of land. He regarded strikes as one of the curses of the country . . . " Lecky, *op cit*, p. 300

<sup>2</sup> Davitt, *op cit*, p. 35

ural-law theories of the economists, however evil their effects might appear to be, he was opposed to any interference with their working.

In the early stages of his agitation, O'Connell had several times acted as counsel for trade unionists in murder cases. He had defended the alleged murderers of Hanlon, the shipwright murdered in 1825. He had accepted other similar briefs, though complaint was made that he had betrayed the men's interests.<sup>1</sup> In 1831 he had been counsel for the defence in the case of the "Carrigshock massacre".<sup>2</sup> At this period he was the idol of the Dublin trade unionists. They were ardent Repealers. It was their belief that the Union, by causing the native aristocracy to migrate to London, had produced the decline of trade and consequent unemployment from the evil effects of which Dublin workers were unquestionably suffering. In December 1830, arrangements had been made for the various crafts and trades to parade through the city, with banners flying, to O'Connell's house, there to present him with an address on the Repeal question. The procession being forbidden by the lord lieutenant, O'Connell persuaded the artisans to abandon their project. Consequently, three delegates from each trade waited upon him quietly and presented the address. Again, at the end of the following January, a "prodigious" and "impassioned" multitude accompanied "the Liberator" from his Merrion-square residence, Dublin, to the pier at Kingstown. "After he had spoken for some time, the trades defiled before him with banners flying, as before a military commander." O'Connell concealed from the demonstrators the fact that his return to London would have to be postponed owing to court proceedings against him, "lest bursting into fury at his unmerited ill-treatment, they should

<sup>1</sup> Report of 1838 Committee, *op. cit.*, p. 215

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Daunt, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 548-550.

cry havoc! and plunge the country into bloodshed and destruction".<sup>1</sup>

Despite O'Connell's discountenancing of the "Trades Political Union" and his cooperation with the Whigs in 1831, another monster demonstration of the trades was staged, in support of O'Connell and Repeal, on the occasion of the entry into Dublin in 1835 of the new Lord Lieutenant Lord Mulgrave. At O'Connell's instigation, the Dublin trade unions mustered their members and marched, by trades and under banners, from Kingstown to Dublin. Each trade carried two flags, one bearing the device of the particular trade, the other with a harp without the crown. The trade unions at this time were regarded by Mr. Baker, deputy grand treasurer of the Orange Society, as "political unions"; he even alleged that O'Connell was president.<sup>2</sup> A Downshire Quaker, though he had suffered from the Orangemen, also regarded the Dublin trade unions as dangerous "political associations and combinations".<sup>3</sup>

It was not long, however, before the idol of organised labour proved himself to be their worst enemy. As early as 1832 O'Connell had made himself conspicuous by his clash with Dr. Doyle on the question of a poor law for Ireland. O'Connell was consistently opposed on the ground that it would enslave the Irish poor, and that the necessary

<sup>1</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, II, pp. 532-533 and 543-544.

<sup>2</sup> "3093 Did those trades' unions appear to be at all associated for the purpose of trade or commerce?—Not at all, solely for political purposes" "3094 Do you know whether these meetings took any measures with regard to trade or commerce, or for the improvement of the arts?—I never heard of any" "3095 Their proceedings were exclusively directed to political subjects?—They were" Evidence of Hugh Ryves Baker, before Select Committee on Orange Lodges in Ireland, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1835, XV; cf. also *ibid*, 3053-3056, 3061-3067 and 3075-3103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, evidence of Mr. James Christie, esp. 5778.

taxation would swell the numbers of the poor<sup>1</sup> In common with so many of his contemporaries O'Connell accepted without cavil the curious structure of inexorable laws compiled by the great economists of the early nineteenth century. He seems to have had little or no conception of the wretched conditions of labour throughout the British Isles; he was filled with apprehension lest the action of misguided philanthropists, such as Lord Ashley and Mr. Hyndley, throw the whole industrial system out of gear His vote for Mr Poulett Thompson's Regulation of Factories Bill (1836) clearly exemplifies his social philosophy This Bill proposed to exempt children between the ages of twelve and thirteen from the operation of the 8-hour day Act of 1833<sup>2</sup> There is no need to give credence to the allegation in *Blackwood's Magazine* that O'Connell had sold his vote for "a purse of £700 from the Unitarian and Dissenting mill-owners and others"<sup>3</sup> His own explanation of his vote carries conviction.

I went down to vote against the bill But I heard it stated—and it is admitted that it was stated—that 25,000 children would be put out of employment if the bill passed, and this was confirmed

<sup>1</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, II, pp 551-552

<sup>2</sup> Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol xxxiii, p 788 (May 9, 1836) Cf. also O'Connell's speech on Lord Ashley's motion for the second reading of his Factories Regulation Bill, June, 1838 Hansard, *op cit*, vol xliii, p 978

<sup>3</sup> "Mr. Daniel O'Connell had spoken on various occasions, in and out of Parliament, in behalf of the factory children, three days before the debate alluded to, he had sought out Lord Ashley to assure him of his support, comprehending, of course, the whole weight of the 'tail', on the day of trial, to the indignant scorn and contempt of all men, he and they voted against him and against the infant applicants for mercy. . . The sordid Judas of these days betrayed them for gold" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol xl, p 116 (July, 1836). But cf Fagan, *Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell* (Cork, 1847), vol II, pp 561-576, for another version of the incident the money was paid to assist O'Connell in recovering his seat

by subsequent evidence that at that age, so far from factory work being injurious to children, the number of deaths in the cotton factory of children in this employment is only one out of five to other trades in England, proving its salubrity [*sic*!]. And again, Sir Robert Peel carried my vote that night, for he pressed upon the ministers the appointment of inspectors for the protection of the factory children . I acted upon that occasion merely for the advantage of the children, and would to God, children of 13 years old in Ireland could earn the money which the English factory children might have earned.<sup>1</sup>

Toward the close of the year 1837, O'Connell outraged his warmest supporters, the Dublin combinators, by a series of attacks on the system of combination. His first attack was delivered at the Dublin Trades Political Union.<sup>2</sup> November 6, 1837.

I hope [said the *Liberator*] that the words which I now speak will have due influence, I hope that everyone who hears them will be anxious to increase the security and interest of employers; for it is only thus that they will consult for the interest of the employed. Will anyone imagine that employers will be induced to lay out their capital, and exert themselves for the improvement of trade, if they are not encouraged, and that a system of intimidation is practiced against them?<sup>3</sup>

Thereupon, O'Connell moved a resolution condemning the system of combination.<sup>4</sup> The seconder of the resolution

<sup>1</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, II, p 599, *cf.* also Fagan, *op cit*, II, pp 575-576 This explanation was given in his speech at the General Association, Oct 31, 1837

<sup>2</sup> This body should not be confused with the "aggregate meeting" referred to in Chapter III, though the personnel overlapped

<sup>3</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 7, 1837, gives a full report of this meeting

<sup>4</sup> The resolution concludes "they [the combinators] may rest assured that the vengeance of an outraged God, and the severe but just punishment of the laws will not fail to overtake their abominable crimes."

"felt that he could pronounce boldly and confidently that the Trades Union was totally disconnected with the system alluded to in that resolution (cheers)".<sup>1</sup>

On St. Stephen's Day following, an "Aggregate Meeting of the Tradesmen of Dublin" was held in the Old Chapel, Townsend-street, "to repel the allegations pronounced by Mr O'Connell, in some of his recent speeches against Combination". Representatives of the various trades contrasted their activities with the charges brought against them and with the activities of their assailants, e g :

For the use of the aged and infirm members of our trade we have expended on a house no less a sum than 747*l*. For the support of our old men for the last two years only, we have paid a sum of 300*l*, at so much a week, and so in proportion with respect to the widows of members of our trade; then it costs us 40*l* a year for coffins, and I may say that we contribute, at the lowest, 60*l* a year to other useful charities (tremendous cheering). To our maligners I say "Go thou and do likewise" (great cheering) <sup>2</sup>

O'Connell attempted to refute the "calumnies" circulated against him by the artisans; at a further meeting of the artisans of Dublin, January 8, 1838, he offered to "endeavour to have inserted in the contemplated corporation reform bill the privilege to each trade of electing a representative in the common council". "I may", he continued,

<sup>1</sup> Mr J Martin. "As a proof he would say that a man who had been accused of that species of combination, and has stood his trial, but was acquitted by a jury of his countrymen, was nevertheless excluded from that union, lest any stain should attach to it from the suspicion of that species of crime having fallen upon one of its members (hear, hear, from Mr O'Connell and cheers) "

<sup>2</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Dec. 27, 1837 O'Connell was unable to attend this meeting, "owing to indisposition" (Fagan, *op cit*, II, p. 662); the fact of indisposition was brought in question by the assembled tradesmen

"be mistaken, for no man is infallible, but this I do assert that the tradesmen of Dublin possess no sincerer friend living than I am" O'Connell improved the opportunity to establish once for all his reputation as a true friend of Irish labour:

I now come to a charge made against me by an operative coachmaker named M'Donagh—"that I bought a carriage in London in preference to Dublin". I was about eight years at the bar when I got a carriage. I bought it and paid for it at Hutton's. I bought a second carriage at Cooper's, in Mary Street; a third at Cooper's; and a fourth and a fifth at Hutton's for all of which I paid. Now I ask, has any single individual with five times my means, since the Union, purchased five carriages in Dublin? Nay more, two of my daughters, when they were married at my house in Merrion-Square, purchased a carriage each; so that out of one house in Dublin seven carriages were bought. I have, therefore, bought twice as many carriages as any other family in Dublin, but that would be no excuse for my getting a carriage in London. Do you know what my answer is to Mr M'Donagh? I mean that individual no harm, but I am bound to say that his assertion is a falsehood. I never got a carriage built in London. I never got a barouche, a britzka, a gig, or anything else built in London. I even got my pantaloons, my coats, my waistcoats made in Dublin. I was attacked by one of the operative tailors also; and now I ask does he know anybody else who when he wants a waistcoat in London sends to Dublin for it? I don't wear a stitch that is not bought at Jerry M'Carthy's. He is a relation of my own, and I am proud of him. I have not a better relation living than that tailor. Were these assertions then fair towards the employer of Dublin tradesmen? I remember upon one occasion, when going from London to Brighton, and from thence to Edinburgh and Glasgow, in company with one whose society I can never again enjoy, I exchanged a carriage for a second-hand light chaise; but as for buying a carriage in London, I did so as much as I bought a tower . . . This is

my explanation; and be kind enough, Mr. Chairman, to tell the thirty honest men who gave [you] the address, that I should be ashamed to look my fellow-countrymen in the face if I were capable of expending one penny out of Ireland; and one of my greatest afflictions is, that I am compelled by my parliamentary duties to spend one shilling among the English.

At the close of this meeting, O'Connell secured the passage of resolutions condemnatory of combinations.<sup>1</sup>

At a subsequent meeting in the Royal Exchange, the Liberator was prevented from speaking and his person was only saved through the intervention of the authorities. "Another meeting was held by adjournment, at which the Lord Mayor again presided" Here, overriding all interruptions and protests from the men, O'Connell criticised the rules of the several trades, and "showed them to be illegal".<sup>2</sup> O'Connell's strictures and Dr Murray's preachments on the enormity of the sins Catholic tradesmen were guilty of, alike failed to convince the Dublin workers<sup>3</sup> "The Manchester trades'-union" concluded an address to the Dublin trades in the following terms:

<sup>1</sup> Fagan, *op cit*, II, pp 663-664 This curious defence is reproduced here because it so clearly indicates the nature of O'Connell's ideas on labour questions As usual, his forensic ability enabled him to overwhelm all protests and objections from the floor, it was therefore unnecessary for him to explain how he could spend a shilling in England without spending a penny out of Ireland Cf *Freeman's Journal*, Jan 9, 1838, for a full report of this meeting

<sup>2</sup> Fagan, *op cit*, II, p 665 "Here, O'Connell manfully faced the whole body of the trades . But he was not listened to The greatest confusion prevailed and the most insulting language was directed against him . . The hostility of the tradesmen was most violent, and on leaving the meeting, he was received with deep and continued groans"

<sup>3</sup> Dr Murray was Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin "But the spirit of combination was too wide spread to be checked even by such powerful incentives to virtue as such a document from so eminent a divine." Fagan, *op. cit*, II, p. 666



Fellow-workmen—Until you rid yourselves of that insidious foe, you will never obtain possession of your social rights. With him we are not safe. Without him we could fight the battle of our freedom more effectively, and speedily achieve a triumph for our cause, and real justice for Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

O'Connell's denunciation of trade unionism culminated in his speech on the floor of the House of Commons, February 13, 1838.<sup>2</sup> In this philippic, he employed all those powers of scolding that had enabled him to silence even such an opponent as Biddy Moriarty, the famous Dublin virago. "The Liberator began with an extended commentary on the repeal of the combination laws

He called it Mr. Hume's Act. He did not believe that whenever the country lost that hon. Gentleman—and he conceived that whenever it did happen it would be a great loss—but that no more honourable inscription could be placed on his tomb than that he was the person that brought in that Act of Parliament. . . . That Act stated what it was that was permitted to be done in future. It allowed combination to every class of workmen. The Act had been called the great charter of the workmen of this country, and it was so.

After this preamble, O'Connell turned to an examination of the situation in Dublin and of its causes.

Wages, which were the price of labour, must depend upon the demand; and when the supply was greater than the demand, the price of labour of course must be lowered. This was the condition of Ireland; there was a great supply of labour, and a

<sup>1</sup> Daunt, *op cit*, II, p. 606, Fagan, *op cit*, II, p. 666, see also various speeches of O'Connell and of Sheil.

<sup>2</sup> Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. XI, pp. 1084-1097.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of O'Connell's encounter with this redoubtable lady, see Owen-Madden, *Revelations of Ireland in the Past Generation* (Dublin, 1848), pp. 113-117.

small demand for it. Labour was in such quantities that labourers were ready to accept the small wages of sixpence a day, . . . The question, then, in Ireland was, how was the demand to be created? . . . It was only to be created by tempting capitalists to the country, in order that having cheap labour they might have profits from it. The misfortune of Ireland was, that workmen, impatient of their present state of suffering, did not wait for a gradual and progressive improvement, but they endeavoured by monopoly to obtain that which ought to arise from the competition of employers . . . The monopoly was almost complete in Dublin. . . . He had sought for, he had challenged public discussion.<sup>1</sup>

"By a clever analysis of the rules of the Irish societies, which he made out to be purely destructive and selfish, he condemned, in a speech of great power, all attempts on the part of trade combinations to regulate the conditions of labour."<sup>2</sup> As an overwhelming testimony to the reliability of the opinions which he had embodied in resolutions submitted to the several meetings in Dublin, O'Connell adduced "a statement made by the merchants of Dublin, which was of a terrific nature"; many of these gentlemen, he pointed out, had fought him politically for years, "but all of them had agreed to the resolutions to which he had referred". As for re-enacting the laws against combinations, however, "he desired no such thing, for some combinations were not only harmless, but meritorious, and he wished to separate unions of this kind from those of a pernicious character"

This concession to informed English opinion is nothing short of contemptible, the attempt to secure condemnation

<sup>1</sup> As noted above, "public discussion" meant to O'Connell the opportunity to deliver a monologue, he did not challenge public debate

<sup>2</sup> S & B Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 ed.), p. 171. This is a modification of their earlier opinion that the rules of the Irish societies, "it must be confessed, were abominably selfish" (1907 ed, p. 155)

at Westminster of the Irish working-class organisations by contrasting them with the "meritorious" societies to be found in Great Britain stands out in glaring contrast to the arguments the Irish Liberator used at home. "This system", he had said in Dublin, "is foreign to this country; the seed of it was brought over here from Manchester"; therefore he had urged his constituents to "send abroad to the world the utter and unqualified condemnation of so vile a system—of that system which would plunder Mr. Guinness' property".<sup>1</sup>

Under the circumstances he urged a Parliamentary inquiry into the activities of the trade unions. Arguing that "It was from Manchester that these unions came" and citing many indications of lawlessness arising out of the application of the new Poor Law in Great Britain, he claimed that the inquiry should not be confined to Ireland, but extended to the whole United Kingdom. Accordingly, a committee to investigate trade unions and their activities was substituted for the proposed committee to inquire into the transportation of five Glasgow cotton-spinners. As noted in an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> the evidence taken by this 1838 Committee failed to substantiate O'Connell's charges. The Committee's findings were so unsatisfactory to the moving spirits that no report was ever drawn up.

The best estimate of O'Connell's concepts of social justice and social philosophy is embodied in his own speech, at the State Trials, February, 1844. O'Connell was tried for con-

<sup>1</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Nov 7, 1837. Though no action was taken by the Government to put down the combinations, Messrs Guinness still have enough property to warrant the boast that "the sum now paid (Aug, 1919) to the Commissioners of Excise and Customs for [Beer] Duty amounts to as much as £25,000 per working day—equivalent to over £5,000,000 sterling in a year". "The total amount of water used by Messrs Guinness in a year is as much as 800,000,000 gallons" *Guide Book* published by Arth. Guinness Son & Co., Limited, Dublin, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. chapter III, *supra*

spiracy before a special jury composed of Dublin Orangemen. Yet, like the Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, the uncrowned king was filled with pride to recall that he had saved Britain from revolution.

There is not one of you, gentlemen of the jury, who does not, I presume, remember the fearful system of combination which prevailed eight years ago in Dublin. . . Could I not easily have made myself popular with these combiners? I opposed them publicly—I stood alone—I opposed them at the peril of my life, and I owe the protection of my life at the meeting held in the Royal Exchange, at which many operatives differing from me in religion and politics attended, to the protection of the police. You will find, too, my perpetual opposition, to Ribandism. With the influence I possessed, could I not have raised the poverty of Ireland against its property, if I chose and insisted that all those who were rich should feed all those who were poor? . . . You have seen my conduct with respect to the Chartists. They were in arms—up in insurrection throughout England—crowding in thousands and tens of thousands through all her manufacturing towns—their doctrines were spreading—their disciples increasing, for there was something fascinating for the poorer classes in the principles of the Charter. It purposed a violation of all property—its followers were numerous—they offered me aid.

. . . I denounced them—I denounced their doctrines—I drove them from Ireland—the people were so much opposed to it that the Chartists absolutely committed an outrage upon the Irish at Manchester. It has been read to you that the moment we discovered that a Chartist had joined the association, his money was returned to him, and his name struck off the list of members. . . . My Lords, I do firmly declare that if I had not opposed Chartism, it would have passed over and spread from one end of Ireland to the other. I shall ever rejoice that I kept Ireland free from this pollution.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *London Times*, Feb 7, 1844. There is something infinitely pathetic in the spectacle of this septuagenarian Irishman, arraigned on an absurd charge, apologising for his whole career to a packed jury and a bench

One only of the Repealers, Feargus O'Connor, who as member for Cork had elicited the approbation of O'Connell, might have given a more humane twist to King Dan's policy. Feargus, however, quarreled with O'Connell, threw himself into the Chartist agitation, and was lost to Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The quarrel between O'Connor and O'Connell arose precisely on the question of the relations of the nationalist and labour movements. O'Connor perceived, what neither Irish nationalists nor British labourites are yet able to comprehend, the identity of interest between nationalist Ireland and working-class Britain.<sup>2</sup> The sufferings of the mass of the English people were of the same kind and redounded to the interests of the same class as oppressed the Irish people. Capitalism and landlordism formed an interlocking directorate, holding sway over both islands equally. Though the British labouring classes had no voice in the government whose destruction was aimed at by Irish leaders, though they had their own quarrels with that government, the British workers' patriotic feelings were only too easily aroused against Irish rebels, who for their part were indiscriminating in their hatred of England, unable to bring themselves to seek allies in any class whatsoever of the English population. Such an attitude on both sides of the Chan-

of placemen, who refused the Liberator even the sorry satisfaction of being accorded the honour due to his rank as Q. C. The jollification of O'Connell and his associates in Richmond Prison over their martyrdom for Ireland is not the most inspiring incident of a long career of effort. Cf. Daunt, *op. cit.*, II, p. 712.

<sup>1</sup> For an unsympathetic account of O'Connor and his relations with O'Connell, see Owen-Madden, *Ireland and its Rulers*, chs. xiv-xvi. "The Rig of Fergus O'Connor". For the other side of the picture, cf. Connolly, *Labour in Ireland* (Dublin and London, 1920), pp. 156-158.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connell, unwilling to acknowledge any justice in the Chartists' demands, refused to admit this identity, though realising the possibility of effecting the junction. *Vide supra*, O'Connell's speech at the State trials, cf. also Sheil's speech on the same occasion.

nel caused the loss to Ireland's cause of such leaders of the "English" labour movement as Bronterre O'Brien and John Doherty<sup>1</sup>

The Young Irelanders differed from the Repealers in their ardent nationalism and their detestation of all things English. For them there could be no British connection: "Not to repeal the Union, then, but to repeal the Conquest—not to disturb or dismantle the empire, but to abolish it forever—not to fall back on '82 but act up to '48" "O'Connell made no mistake when he pronounced it [Repeal] to be not worth the price of one drop of blood; . . . Not the constitution that Tone died to abolish, but the constitution that Tone died to obtain, independence, full and absolute independence, for this island, and for every man within this island"<sup>2</sup> Yet the smoke of their blazing hatred of English tyranny blinded the eyes of Davis and Mitchel to the possible tyranny of the "respectable" classes in Ireland. They could not help but realise that the aristocracy of Ireland was anti-Irish and solidly opposed to national independence. "In Ireland they [i. e., the nobles] are its disgrace. They were first to sell and would be last to redeem it. Treachery to it is daubed on many an escutcheon in its heraldry. It is the only nation where slaves have been ennobled for contributing to its degradation." Yet they could not resist the temptation to appeal for a change of heart on the part of "the filthy mass of national treason that forms the man's part of many an Irish lord"<sup>3</sup>

The English social system shared in the Young Ire-

<sup>1</sup>For an appreciation of these men and others, cf. Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, ch. xv ("Some More Irish Pioneers of the Socialist Movement")

<sup>2</sup>Lalor, Letter to the *Irish Felon*, in Fogarty, *James Fintan Lalor*, *op. cit.*, p. 59 and pp. 56-7.

<sup>3</sup>"Ireland's People", in *Essays of Thomas Davis* (Dundalk, 1914), pp. 173-174.

landers' denunciation of England and all her works. Among the most popular of the suggested remedies of the economists for the wretched condition of Ireland's rack-rented peasantry was the conversion of "uneconomic" holdings into large farms and the establishment of Irish industries to absorb the surplus population thus turned off their lands. It was urged that, though lack of capital, hereditary skill, shipping, and the command of markets would handicap Ireland in competing with England, yet cheap labour, water-power, harbours, and a geographical location favourable for trade would, under the protection that a national government could afford, enable Ireland to imitate Germany. Against this widespread demand Davis raised his voice in protest:

Let us pause on these much desired manufactures, if it be possible to make yeomen ("bonder", as the Norwegians say) of our peasantry. To us much meditating, it seems that if England had nothing to tempt us with but its manufacturing system, 'twere better trust in God and remain as we are. The equal distribution of comfort, education, and happiness is the only true wealth of nations. What is it to the English father, with an emaciated body, that Manchester can sell cheap cottons, and Birmingham surpass the fame of Damascus? How gains he because Lord Buccleuch adds another ten thousand to his acres, and the riches of Lord Westminster shame the treasuries of kings? He is a weaver, or the worker in a dye-house, or an iron-worker, and was so from childhood. He grew up amid such revelations of God as the crash of stampers and the twirling arms of some bright steel Briareus can give, and among sickly faces and vicious and despairing looks, and he came home when a child to a weaver's home. The field, the hill, the tree, the corn, the lowing herd, the bleating lamb, the whistling plough-boy, the village church, he never knew. But he is a man, and is above circumstances. Partly 'tis so, for heaven is merciful, but what a man! That withered, blotched thing, querulous as a sick noble, or desperately calm, stunned

with noisy mill-work; filled to the top of his mind with cranks and yarns, trembling lest fashion, or the change of trade, or the competition of some wretch more desperate than himself, may end his hiring, and drive him to the poor-house. The poor-house! the *prison for poverty*, with its fancy and impertinent lodge, its elaborate starvation, its imprisonment not merely from the vague public through which he used (with some imitation of cheerfulness) to bustle along, but from the wife and children, who, poor and meanness-stricken as they were, were yet the only angels who had entered his tent and sat at meat with him, messengers from heaven reminding him of God.

Oh, no! Oh, no! ask us not to copy English vice, and darkness, and misery and impiety; give us the worst wigwam in Ireland and a dry potato rather than Anglicise us <sup>1</sup>

While far from socialism, the Young Irelanders were not so ready as O'Connell to accept the theories of English economists. "The wages system has broken the yeoman heart of England, though worked by her own gentry; what then would it be in Ireland, under an aristocracy so bad as to have reduced a tenantry to the last stage of misery?" <sup>2</sup>

Less large-hearted than Davis, less clear-sighted than Lalor, John Mitchel was unable, until January 1848, to bring himself to abandon "the humbug of 'conciliating classes', winning over landlords to nationality, and the rest of it". <sup>3</sup> Under Lalor's influence, however, Mitchel came to see that social as well as political revolt was needed to overthrow the

<sup>1</sup> "Udalism and Feudalism", *ibid.*, pp. 74-75

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. "Whatever may be the vices of the English aristocracy, they are by choice and nature heavens high above the corresponding class in Ireland. They are never the avowed foes of their tenants or labourers—they do not defame his faith, or insult his priest, or deny his country." *Ibid.*, p. 78

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Mitchel to Lalor, in Fogarty, *op cit.*, p. 120. "I am ashamed to be forced to admit, that on the only question we ever differed about I was wholly wrong."



Saxon influence in Ireland<sup>1</sup> Capitalism became anathema when described as the "English system" Accordingly, Mitchel hailed the February Revolution in Paris as a blow, if not to the power of the English government, at least to the prestige of English social philosophy

Dynasties and thrones are not half so important as workshops, farms, and factories Rather we may say that dynasties and thrones, and even provisional governments, are good for anything exactly in proportion as they secure fair play, justice, and freedom to those who labour.

It is here that France is really ahead of all the world The great Third Revolution has overthrown the enlightened pedantic political economy (what we know in Ireland as the English political economy, or the Famine Political Economy), and has established once and for all the true and old principles of protection to labour, and the right and duty of combination among workmen.

By a decree of the Provisional Government dated February 25th —

It engages to guarantee work to all citizens. It recognises the right of workmen to combine for the purpose of enjoying the lawful proceeds of their labour.

The French Republicans do not, like ignorant and barbarous English Whigs, recognise a right to pauper relief and make it a premium upon idleness. They know that man has a charter to eat bread in the sweat of his brow and not otherwise, and they acknowledge that highest and most sacred mission of government—to take care that bread may be had for the earning. For this reason they expressly, and in set terms, renounce "competition" and "free trade" *in the sense in which an English Whig uses these words*, and deliberately adopt combination and protection—that the nation should combine to

<sup>1</sup> "I then made up my mind that all the symptoms of landlord nationality we had heard so much about were merely a screw applied to the English government" *Ibid*, p 121

protect by laws its own national industry, and that individuals should combine with other individuals to protect by trades associations the several branches of national industry

The free trade and competition—in other words, the English system—is pretty well understood now; its obvious purpose and effect are to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, to make capital the absolute ruler of the world, and labour a blind and helpless slave. By free trade the manufacturers of Manchester are enabled to clothe India, China, and South America, and the artisans of Manchester can hardly keep themselves covered from the cold. By dint of free trade Belfast grows more linen cloth than it ever did before, but the men who weave it have hardly a shirt to their backs. Free trade fills with corn the stores of speculating capitalists, but leaves those who have sown and reaped the corn without a meal. Free trade unpeoples villages and peoples poorhouses, consolidates farms and gluts the graveyards with famished corpses

There is to be no more of this free trade in France. Men can no longer “do what they like with their own” there

February, 1848, came, and the pretext of the reform banquet. \*Again Paris had her three days’ agony, and was delivered of her third and fairest born revolution

There could be no mistake this time, the rubbish of thrones and dynasties is swept out for ever, and the people sit sovereign in the land. One of their first and greatest acts is the enactment of a commission to inquire into the whole of the great labour question, and to all the documents issued by this commission appear signed the names of Louis Blanc and the insurgent of Lyons, Albert, Ouvrier (workman). He is not ashamed of his title, though now a great officer of the State. He is a working man, and is proud of it “in any bond, bill, quittance, or obligation,” Ouvrier.

Sixty-six years ago the farmers of France had their revolution. Eighteen years ago the “respectable” middle classes had theirs, and have made a good penny in it since, but upon this third and last all the world may see the stamp and impress of the men who made it—Albert, Ouvrier, his mark. We have all

three revolutions to accomplish, and the sooner we set about it the better. Only let us hope all the work may be done in one. Let not the lessons of history be utterly useless.

The detestable system of "free trade" and "fair competition" which is described by Louis Blanc as "that specious system of leaving unrestricted all pecuniary dealings between man and man, which leaves the poor man at the mercy of the rich, and promises to cupidity that waits its time an easy victory over hunger that cannot wait", the system that seeks to make Mammon and not God or justice rule in this world—in one word, the English or famine system—must be abolished utterly, in farms or workshops, in town and country, abolished utterly; and to do this were worth three revolutions, or three times three<sup>1</sup>

This outburst was dictated much less by Mitchel's own social philosophy than by his hatred of England and all things English. In his *Jail Journal*, Mitchel condemned the insurrectionary workmen of the June days—the very men he had so enthusiastically praised for their assault on "English" cant and pedantry:

In June, some people, whom the English newspapers call the "Red Republicans" and Communists, attempted another Paris revolution, which, if successful, would have been itself a horrible affair, and at any rate might have been the death of the Republic, but they were swept from the streets with grape and canister—the only way of dealing with such unhappy creatures.

I cannot believe that all the party called Red Republicans are also Communists, though the English newspapers use the terms

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Connolly, *op cit*, pp 178-181. See also letter to Lord John Russell, in Dillon, *Life of John Mitchel* (London, 1888), I, p 225. "What had law done for these poor wretches and their five million fellow-paupers throughout Ireland? It was the 'law' that carried off all the crops they raised, and shipped them to England,—and cast them off to perish like supernumerary kittens. And what was more shameful and fatal still, this devoted people were in the hands of 'leaders', who told them that all this 'law'—this London Parliament Law—was the law of God. ."

as synonymous—of course to cast odium on the thoroughgoing Republicans I suspect that there is a numerous party of staunch Republicans who believe the Revolution is but half accomplished, which, indeed, may turn out to be the case. But then these ought to make no common cause with Socialists; Socialists are something worse than wild beasts <sup>1</sup>

One of the *Felon* writers, T Devin Reilly, who later became a pioneer of labour journalism in America, had more real sympathy for the workers than Mitchel ever felt.

We are not Communists—we abhor communism for the same reason we abhor poor law systems, and systems founded on the absolute sovereignty of wealth Communism destroys the independence and dignity of labour, makes the workingman a state pauper and takes his manhood from him But, communism or no communism, these 70,000 workmen had a clear right to existence—they had the best right to existence of any men in France, and if they could have asserted their right by force of arms they would have been fully justified. *The social system in which a man willing to work is compelled to starve is a blasphemy, an anarchy, and no system* For the present these victims of monarchic rule, disowned by the republic, are conquered, 10,000 are slain, 20,000 perhaps doomed to the Marquesas. *But for all that the rights of labour are not conquered, and will not and cannot be conquered. Again and again the labourer will rise up against the idler—the workingmen will meet this bourgeoisie, and grapple and war with them till their equality is established, not in word, but in fact.*<sup>2</sup>

To this writer is attributed also an article that appeared anonymously in the *Irish Tribune* of July 1, 1848. This document, entitled "The Rights of Labour", has been used to prove that Lalor, to whom the authorship has sometimes been assigned, had "socialistic" views It stands as the

<sup>1</sup> Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (New York, 1854), p 98; entry of Nov 22, 1848

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Connolly, *op cit*, p 184.

only positive claim put forward on behalf of labour by any of the Irish revolutionaries of '48. Even here, however, there is little more than a negation of "English" doctrines

Man was created free, and at the same time a social being; in order to enjoy the advantages which society can give, each individual tacitly agrees to relinquish as much of his freedom as may be found incompatible with the existence of society. All men are abstractly equal, and should be so in law, but are not so in fact, for we find a wide difference between men, as well physically and morally as intellectually . .

As one individual may be morally, physically, or intellectually superior to another, he will naturally, by the use of his labour obtain more products—this is, more capital or wealth—than the other and as the arrangements of society allow the children to inherit the capital of the father, it must necessarily happen that great inequalities must exist in every society in relation to wealth; that, in fact, there must be rich and poor. This arrangement of society is just, and could not be otherwise. Although some may be born poor, and therefore inheriting no accumulated labour capital, they cannot, therefore, justly demand that a new distribution of wealth should take place—that the property of the rich should be given to them. But, on the other hand, society cannot demand from them to become machines, to work to an extent unheard of among savages, and yet deny them that comfort, and that share in progress which ought to be the sole end of civilisation. The poor man is entitled to live, in the fullest sense of the word, he is entitled to share in all the accumulated advantages of civilisation, not only as regards his physical happiness, but also his moral and intellectual cultivation. Why should he alone have no future, except that of suffering? Why should anyone dare to debar him of the enjoyment of domestic ties, these greatest incentives to virtue?

The ancient civilisation of Greece permitted the same inequalities of rich and poor as our modern civilisation does; but with the Greeks the intellectual and moral man was the highest

object of study. They laboured and accumulated capital; but the rich among them, instead of employing the whole of that accumulated capital in debasing the men who made it, by subjecting them more and more or in ministering to their own animal senses, sacrificed their merely personal comfort to the public enjoyment of the nation. Hence were produced those masterpieces of art which we can only admire, but not imitate . . . .

During the Middle Ages, the peasants were the serfs of nobility; but although the conditions of their tenure was hard, although frequently robbed of all the fruits of their labours, they had a real interest in the land—an interest which in some countries they were able to transmit to their children. . . . Each trade formed a guild, itself under the protection of a patron saint. The guild regulated the conditions of apprenticeship, and prevented the trade being overstocked by taking too many apprentices. This apprenticeship was a useful custom; it required a considerable sacrifice of time, and consequently of money, and, therefore, prevented too great competition; it kept up a sympathy between the employer and the employed, as the apprentice in most cases resided with the master. The apprentice's hours of labour were also limited, and thus he had ample means to improve and amuse himself. . . .

With the breaking down of the old society and the commencement of the present state of things, a new science was created which had for its object the study of the social conditions of man, and to this science the name of political economy has been given. This science has attracted great attention in England, because the evils of the present social system have been more developed there than in any other country. It is only there and in countries blasted by her rule that *true pauperism* exists in all its unmitigated horrors. The desire to accumulate wealth, and the state of things produced by this desire, naturally led everybody to study a science which he was given to understand would help him to attain his end and hence whole libraries have been written on the subject; but what is termed the science of political economy in England bears the

same relation to that science as the quackery of Parr of Holloway does to the science of medicine

We do not, however, mean to say that the English economists have never enunciated any truths, on the contrary, a good many valuable laws have been deduced by Adam Smith and others; but the errors which they have promulgated far outnumber the truths, and have done incalculable mischief. They have materialized everything, with them the sole object of existence is the production of wealth, not the advantages which its equable distribution would have on the community. They only look to the sum total of the wealth of a country, even where that wealth is in the hands of a few millionaires, while the masses are debased paupers—with them England is the most flourishing country in the world, because from acting on their principles it possesses in the aggregate more wealth than most other nations; but they forget that one half of the population is reduced to a state of degradation unparalleled in Europe. They make that *the end* for which we *live*, which most other nations consider *the means* by which we may *enjoy life*. Under their influence the arts, abstract science, or a healthy literature can with difficulty flourish. Sismondi's answer to Ricardo, one of the most eminent of them, gives in one sentence their whole character: "*What, is wealth then everything? are men absolutely nothing?*" In Ireland what is bad in their principles has been acted upon, but the good has been totally neglected. We hear constantly our flippant *ameliorators*, the turnip-headed candidates for prominent places whose knowledge of legislation has been gleaned from the leaders of a superficial press, or the stupid speeches of a class of "gentlemen" little better informed than themselves, talk about *capital* and a few other words devoid of meaning to them. We would be fortunate if all our economists were of the same value; what injury could we suffer, for instance, from such trash as the "Clarendonian talk about Repeal," etc.? But there are others whose poison is more insidious, and who have taken the best means to diffusing it through our veins—such as one Whately a goodly specimen of the foreign vermin we have allowed to crawl over us—of

such we must beware already they have received a *few lessons* from another quarter, and the *Irish Tribune* will continue the tuition from time to time<sup>1</sup>

Most of the men of '48 desired only a national revolution; those few who spoke of the social revolution meant little more than a warding off of the worst evils consequent on the Industrial Revolution. Davis advocated a return to the domestic system,<sup>2</sup> others a return to the guild system; none advocated any form of socialisation.

Lalor, indeed, pleaded eloquently for a social revolution, a peasant revolution. The urban workers were few in numbers, and their grievances little known. Lalor, his eyes focused on the land, had little sympathy to spare for them.

We are in the habit of hearing it asserted that a large development of manufacturing industry is what Ireland needs, and that to establish it should be her chief object . . . This is an error I could wish to see abandoned . . . I am prepared to prove—what, indeed, any man may prove to himself—that neither by the private enterprise of individuals or companies, neither by the force of national feeling anyhow exerted, neither by public association or public action of any kind or extent, nor by government aid, if such aid could be expected—neither by these or any other means and appliances can a manufacturing system be established in Ireland, nor so much as a factory built on firm ground, until the support of a numerous and efficient agricultural yeomanry be first secured. Good friends, you are recommending us to encourage native manufacture and to form manufacturing associations; tradesmen and townfolk of Ireland will you cease to follow a phantom, and give hand and help to create such a yeomanry?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fogarty, *op cit*, pp 145-153

<sup>2</sup> "Home Manufactures we ask, Ay HOME Manufactures, MANUFACTURES MADE AT HOME Remember that ere the Factory System existed Manufactures were carried on in the farm-house" *Essays of Thomas Davis, op cit.*, p 75

<sup>3</sup> *Nation* letter "To the Landowners of Ireland", in Fogarty, *op cit*, pp 23-24.



From this purpose Lalor never deviated. His teachings anticipated those of Henry George, his policy that of Michael Davitt.

The principle I state and mean to stand upon, is this, that the entire ownership of Ireland, moral and material, up to the sun, and down to the centre, is vested of right in the people of Ireland; that they, and none but they, are the land-owners and law-makers of this island; that all laws are null and void not made by them; and all titles to land invalid not conferred and confirmed by them, and that this full right of ownership may and ought to be asserted and enforced by any and all means which God has put in the power of man. In other, if not plainer words, I hold and maintain that the entire soil of a country belongs of right to the people of that country, and is the rightful property not of any class, but of the nation at large, in full effective possession, to let to whom they will on whatever tenures, terms, rents, services, and conditions they will. One condition, however, being unavoidable, and essential, the condition that the tenant shall bear full, true, and undivided fealty, and allegiance to the nation, and the laws of the nation whose lands he holds, and own no allegiance whatsoever to any other prince, power, or people, or any obligation of obedience or respect to their will, orders, or laws. I hold further, and firmly believe, that the enjoyment by the people of this right, of first ownership of the soil, is essential to the vigour and vitality of all other rights, to their validity, efficacy, and value, to their secure possession and safe exercise.

Nor did Lalor have any illusions on the value of a political revolution unaccompanied by an overturn of the social system.

For let no people deceive themselves, or be deceived by the words, and colours, and phrases, and forms, of a mock freedom, by constitutions, and charters and articles, and franchises. These things are paper and parchment, waste and worthless. Let laws and institutions say what they will, this fact will be

stronger than all laws, and prevail against them—the fact that those who own your land will make your laws, and command your liberties, and your lives. But this is tyranny and slavery—tyranny in its widest scope, and worst shape; slavery of body and soul from the cradle to the coffin—slavery with all its horrors, and with none of its physical comforts and security; even as it is in Ireland, where the whole community is made up of tyrants, slaves, and slave-drivers. A people whose lands and lives are thus in the keeping and custody of others, instead of in their own, are not in a position of common safety. The Irish famine of '46 is example and proof. The corn crops were sufficient to feed the island. But the landlords *would* have their rents in spite of famine, and in defiance of fever. They took the whole harvest and left hunger to those who raised it. Had the people of Ireland been the landlords of Ireland, not a single human creature would have died of hunger, nor the failure of the potato been considered a matter of any consequence.

Had Lalor applied to trade and industry the principles he so clearly and forcefully enunciated for the land question, he would take rank as the first Irish Nationalist to champion the cause of Labour.

The rights of property may be pleaded. No one has more respect for the real rights of property than I have; but I do not class among them the robber's right by which the lands of this country are now held in fee for the British crown. I acknowledge no right of property in a small class which goes to abrogate the rights of a numerous people. I acknowledge no right of property in eight thousand persons, be they noble or ignoble, which takes away all rights of property, security, independence, and existence itself, from a population of eight millions, and stands in bar to all the political rights of the island, and all the social rights of its inhabitants. I acknowledge no right of property which takes away the food of millions, and gives them a famine—which denies to the peasant the right

of a home, and concedes, in exchange, the right of a workhouse I deny and challenge all such rights, howsoever founded or enforced I challenge them, as founded only on the code of the brigand, and enforced only by the sanction of the hangman. Against them I assert the true and indefeasible right of property—the right of our people to live in this land, and possess it—to live in it in security, comfort, and independence, and to live in it by their own labour, on their own land, as God and nature intended them to do. Against them I shall array, if I can, all the forces that yet remain in this island. And against them I am determined to make war—to their destruction or my own.<sup>1</sup>

The Fenians profited by the error of the Young Irelanders. James Stephens was resolved to avoid a repetition of the tragedy-comedy of Ballinagarry.<sup>2</sup> That vast and respectable class, “the men of no property”, were again resorted to. There was to be no paltering with the landed aristocracy or with the propertied class in the towns. Recruits for the new revolutionary secret society were sought among the workers only.

Twenty years ago Thomas Davis appealed to the aristocracy to save the people with their own hands. We make no appeal to the aristocracy, for we know that, though we speak with the tongues of men and angels, our appeal would be in vain. The hearts of these cruel aristocrats are hard as the nether millstone. They are the willing tools of the alien government whose policy it is to slay the people, or drive them, like noxious vermin, from the land. The people must save themselves. It is a waste of time and labour, or worse, to endeavour to arouse the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *Irish Felon*, in Fogarty, *op cit*, pp 60-66

<sup>2</sup> Cf Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, *op cit*, p 92 “Oct. 24th, 1848—What is this I hear?—A poor extemporized abortion of a rising in Tipperary, headed by Smith O’Brien . . . And, of course, all the world thinks Irish resistance is effectually crushed; and that Ireland’s capacity for resistance was *tested* at this cursed Ballinagarry”

upper and middle classes to a sense of the duty they owe their country. Whatever is not thoroughly rotten in these classes will follow the people. If the classes clept "respectable" who acquiesce in the destruction of the people, or content themselves with "protesting" against it, were swept into the sink, the chances of saving the Irish Nation would be considerably increased. . . .

It is the *people* who have kept the national faith alive; and whatever of that faith exists among the "higher orders" is derived from the people.

In the darkest hour of her dark history the people were true to Ireland. Whoever was false, they never were. Whoever denied her they never did. When she was betrayed and scourged, and spat upon, the hands that lovingly supported her fainting form were the blistered hands of labour. Oh! brave toilers, surely it is reserved for you alone to lift her to her place among the nations.<sup>1</sup>

"It is notorious that Fenianism was regarded with unconcealed aversion, not to say deadly hatred, by not merely the landlords and the ruling classes, but by the Catholic clergy, the middle-class Catholics, and the great majority of the farming classes. It was, in fact, only among the youngest and more intelligent of the labouring class; of the young men of the large towns and cities engaged in the humbler walks of mercantile life; of the artisan and working classes, that it found favour."<sup>2</sup>

Yet the Fenian leaders refused to let their revolutionary movement be converted into a general movement for the emancipation of the working class. The editor of the *Irish People* frowned upon an attempt to identify the interests of Irish Nationalists and the English masses: "If the English

<sup>1</sup> *Irish People*, Jan 23, 1864

<sup>2</sup> Pigott, *Recollections of an Irish Journalist* (Dublin and London, 1882), p. 202

working classes are 'unnational' they deserve some blame at least. . . . We do not see what Feargus O'Connor's leadership of the Chartist movement proves, except it be that the Chartists didn't know very well what they were up to"<sup>1</sup> The editor concludes: "Oughtn't it to be enough for a man to be for Ireland?" Though "if any large number of Irishmen have a 'chivalric love' for their employers they must be very soft-hearted, indeed", the condemnation of those employers arose from the feeling that capitalism was an English institution, and consequently not wanted in Ireland

In reply to the insolent twaddle about "English capital" being the grand want of Ireland, we beg to say that, if we may be permitted to think for ourselves, our greatest need is to get rid of everything English, and that as speedily as possible, and to have our country, and all that it contains to ourselves. Will the *Times* and its masters, therefore, be good enough to take themselves off? That is all the boon we crave. If it is not conceded then the matter must be argued—in another place<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the *Irish People* regularly printed reports of the weekly meetings of the United Trades' Association, is not an indication of sympathy for Trade Unionism on the part of the editors.<sup>3</sup> Though criticising the National League for its follies, and attacking the National Association, the *Irish People* printed reports of both these organisations without comment, as well as the proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy and other bodies. Of socialistic teaching there is even less in the Fenian organ than in the jour-

<sup>1</sup> O'Connor was concisely damned for all Fenians "Feargus O'Connor spent his life not in serving Ireland, but in trying to reform England"

<sup>2</sup> *Irish People*, Sept. 2, 1865.

<sup>3</sup> These reports were also printed with fair regularity in the *Freeman's Journal*

nals of the Young Irelanders, notwithstanding the sources of the society's membership.

The Home Rule movement, as developed by Butt and Parnell, has scant claim to consideration here. Despite the communistic leanings of the Land Leaguers, social revolution was discountenanced by the party leaders. Though Davitt might win the cooperation of Henry George and act in accordance with Lalor's doctrines, the activities of the movement did not extend beyond the land question. Though a Nannetti might be a convinced trade unionist and a Ginnell might personally join in cattle-driving operations, Labour had no more to hope for from Parnellism than from John Redmond or William O'Brien. When Parnell condescended to address himself to the town workers, it was in the patronising vein of an amiable politician, not in the spirit of a champion. In subsequent chapters will be detailed at greater length the attitude of Redmond's Home Rule Party and of the Sinn Feiners (of both the followers of Griffith and of DeValera) to the woes and aspirations of the working class.

Down to the twentieth century, then, there was no National movement ready and willing to sponsor the cause of Labour. The United Irishmen, led by a handful of middle-class Presbyterians, had been Democrats, sympathising with the French Revolution, but quite devoid of working-class philosophy. The Young Irelanders had been decidedly less democratic, if more intensely nationalistic. On the land question some of them had conceived socialistic notions; few of them repudiated industrial capitalism. Their views were based, however, less on their sympathy for the working class of Ireland than on their hatred of England and of all things English, including her social system. Their alternative to capitalism was not socialism, but a return to the methods of the good old days. The Fenians, though a working-class movement in point of personnel, disavowed a

class revolution; they, too, opposed capitalism solely on the ground that it was an English institution. Finally, the apathetic attitude of the constitutional nationalists in the face of social oppression was well characterised by Michael Davitt: "It is exhibiting a callous indifference to the state of social degradation to which the power of the landlords of Ireland has sunk our peasantry to ask them to plod on in sluggish misery from sire to son, from age to age, until we by force of party power may free the country."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Mr Davitt, reported in the *Boston Pilot*, December 21, 1878, cf. Michael Davitt, *op cit*, p. 132

## CHAPTER VI

### LABOUR IN THE BACKWASH

IRISH trade unionism in the second half of the nineteenth century differed from that which has been heretofore discussed in its "defeatism". Trade unionists accepted the new political economy with few reservations. They persisted in combining, but they accepted their share of the responsibility for the welfare of trade and industry, which, they admitted, must and should take precedence of their own welfare. Class-conscious they were, but only in a special sense. They did not claim the right to the enjoyment of the produce of their own labour; they felt no resentment that a few should prosper at the expense of the many. They were prepared to accept the station in life to which God had called them, thankful that He had not assigned to them the role of general labourers. Irish they had almost ceased to be, particularism, not nationalism, was the order of the day.

Ireland had few industries. The linen manufacture in the North was developing on the typical factory basis. Shipbuilding, railroading, brewing, and distilling were the only other important businesses. For the rest there were only the trades—building trades, distributive trades, tailors, bakers, butchers, coopers, hairdressers, etc.—and the mass of the unskilled labourers—dockers, carters, and the like. The trade unions, then, were confined mainly to the skilled crafts, locally organised.

Progress in organisation there was, along two lines: new local unions grew up; old unions were absorbed into the



new amalgamateds. An example of the first type is offered by the origin of the Drapers' Assistants' Trade Union<sup>1</sup>. In 1855, urged by a temporary combination of their employees, eight drapery establishments in Dublin announced a six o'clock closing hour.<sup>2</sup> On August 1, 1859, one firm, Cannock, White, & Co., broke the agreement. A committee from six other firms and from the general body of drapers' assistants met and composed a plea to the offending firm. "We trust, Gentlemen, that this appeal in the interests of a class who have contributed, in no small degree, towards your success in business, will not have been made in vain, and that you will acknowledge the justice of the claims we now advocate." To the curt rejoinder of Cannock, White, & Company that "We consider these hours convenient to the public, liberal to the Assistants, and advantageous to ourselves", the committee replied at great length. The committee took great pains to refute each of the reasons assigned for late closing, in the hope that they could induce the firm "to give up that trifle for which they would sacrifice the future comfort of hundreds". The argument concluded. "Lastly—for peace sake, we beseech you to preserve peace. However unwilling we may be, we shall be obliged to bring the matter before the public, and obtain their verdict thereon." Cannock, White, & Company respectfully replied. "Our minds are fully made up on the matter; and, as to your threat of appealing to the public, you are, of course, at perfect liberty to take what steps you think proper." Another firm followed suit in self-defence, though promising to abide by any general agreement that might be adopted. Only then, September 16, 1859, did the men form a perma-

<sup>1</sup> First Report of the Committee of the Drapers' Early Closing Association (Dublin, 1859), (Haliday Pamphlets · 2209 11)

<sup>2</sup> Seven of them retained a seven o'clock closing hour from April to July inclusive. Saturday closing was fixed at one hour later than usual.

ment association. Thus, out of "the addition of thirty hours in the entire year", a measure affecting upwards of 1,200 employees, arose the Dublin Drapers' Early Closing Association, forerunner of the Irish Drapers' Assistants, which in 1921, having absorbed the workers in many other branches of the distributive trades, paid to the Irish Trade Union Congress affiliation fees of £63 on a membership of 7,500.<sup>1</sup>

An example of the spread of the great British amalgamateds in Ireland is afforded by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. This body was formed in 1851 by the amalgamation of a number of sectional unions. In that year it had 121 branches, including Belfast, Cork, Drogheda, Dublin, and Londonderry. These five branches had 403 members among them. In 1868 branches existed also in Dundalk, Limerick, Lisburn, Newry, and Waterford, the Irish membership had grown to 1,309.<sup>2</sup>

Even the better-established Irish trades succumbed to the superior strength of the British societies. The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, organised in 1860, did not invade Ireland until 1866. In that year it opened in Ireland eight branches; by 1868 it had twelve branches in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

While new local and sectional unions were thus springing up, and while British unions were endeavouring to extend their organisation into Ireland, efforts of a different kind were being made to secure the better functioning of organised labour in its efforts to ameliorate the condition of the skilled craftsmen. The stock panacea for the woes of the Irish artisan was the development of Irish industries. The

<sup>1</sup> 27th Annual Report, Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (1921)

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1868-9, xxxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

competition of imported goods was discountenanced; oppressive taxation was denounced. Better to be overworked and underpaid in the employ of native capitalists than not to be employed at all

Resolved—That it is only by the support and encouragement of Native Manufacture the condition of the Resident Tradesmen can be raised from its present prostrate state, consequent on the importation of foreign manufactured articles, very often of an inferior description, and also by the vast drain of wealth from this impoverished country, which could be utilised at home in remunerative employment in every branch of trade and industrial pursuit <sup>1</sup>

To implement this philosophy, Dublin craftsmen early in 1863 had formed the United Trades' Association

"The object of the Association was the protection of the rights of labour; the only property of the working classes was their capacity of labour, and wherever the artisan went he carried his property with him, which was not consequently liable to the same injury or mutations as other species of property (Hear, hear) The tradesman, however, should recollect, to use the words of Drummond in another way, 'that labour had its duties as well as its rights'. The association had not been formed to interfere with the legitimate progress of trade—on the contrary, their desire was to push trade in every manner possible We are decidedly not advocates of bad or selfish employers. Although they could not denounce them, they could hold up to the eulogy of the artisan class those good employers—not few he was glad to say—who flourished amongst them, and to ask the public at large to assist and countenance them in preference to others not of the same character (Hear, hear). That association

<sup>1</sup>*Freeman's Journal*, Sept 9, 1864 3rd Semi-Annual Report of Dublin United Trades' Association

intended working upon the principle of co-operation. What had made America what she was, but the principle of association? And, if strictly and honestly carried out by the people of Ireland, it must produce good fruits for them also (Cheers)."<sup>1</sup> The better to accomplish this purpose, the Association sought to "amalgamate" the various skilled labour unions of Dublin. While encouraging the builders' labourers to form "a general union among themselves" in order that they might, "if possible", better their condition, the Association did not suggest that they affiliate with the more respectable bodies represented on their committee.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the united trades were most anxious to secure the affiliation of the carpenters.<sup>3</sup> It was matter for special congratulation when such an "intelligent and influential trade" as the Coachmakers' Society agreed to "form another link of the United Trades' Association".<sup>4</sup> The tradesmen felt a grave responsibility for the good conduct of their members towards their employers and for the quality of their work. Thus, complaint being made against the brassfounders' attitude on country work, the Association did not rest content until the brassfounders had "satisfied the committee that they merely asked a fair remuneration for their labour, and were satisfied to remain at home if an employer found it his interest to send to the country apprentices and unskilled hands to do his work . . . but

<sup>1</sup> Speech of the Secretary at the Association's dinner, April 9, 1864. The toasts drunk included "Ireland, our native Land", "Native manufacture and its speedy uprise", "Our Employers" Cf *Irish People*, April 16, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, June 4, 1864. The Association condescended so far as to arrange that as many of its members as could conveniently attend the organising meeting of the labourers should do so. At the same meeting the societies of cutlers and hatters were welcomed into the Association by their fellow-tradesmen.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Irish People*, May 20 and July 8, 1865.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, July 2, 1864.

the brassfounders would not be responsible for such work".<sup>1</sup> At the commencement of 1865, twenty-five "bodies of skilled artisans in the metropolis" were united in the Trades Association.<sup>2</sup> A vigorous propaganda was carried on to increase the membership. Deputations were sent to the various unaffiliated societies to explain the objects and rules; new societies were cordially invited to join.<sup>3</sup>

Nor was the organising work confined to the capital. The Dublin United Trades Association was in regular weekly correspondence with a similar body in Cork.<sup>4</sup> In 1864 was put on foot an ambitious project of amalgamating all the skilled workmen of Ireland into one grand general union. The opportunity afforded by the Dublin Exhibition was eagerly embraced, with the ready support of the employers. The president of the United Trades Association, mindful of the fact that the other principal cities and towns would send deputations from their trade bodies, conceived the happy idea that "it would be well to extend hospitality to them, and show them that we were not selfishly inclined to allow them to depart without at least partaking of refreshments". As his organisation had no funds available for the purpose, the president "applied to Sir John Gray for advice as to how the idea could be carried out, and that gentleman solved the question in the most practical way by giving me his personal guarantee for £20 to insure the success of the good work of feting our fellow-tradesmen who are coming to Dublin to take part in a national ceremonial".<sup>5</sup> The reception evoked from the provinces warm approbation of the idea of a general association of the Irish

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Feb 25, 1865

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Jan 7, 1865

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, June 3, 1865

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1864.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, Aug 6, 1864 statement of Pres. Shanley.

trades, the "particular object" of which should be "to encourage and foster native art and home manufacture"—especially "if the intelligent tradesmen of Dublin would consider it practicable to form a nucleus of a benevolent society on a scale that would link the trades of the several cities and towns in Ireland". The Dublin United Trades Association undertook the formation of what it was hoped "would become the most useful and respectable organisation in Ireland".<sup>1</sup>

It must not be inferred that there was any desire to form a purely Irish national organisation. On the contrary, the Association looked with favour on the British amalgamateds, to which several of its member societies belonged.

It is only simple justice to say that many of the trades of our city labour under certain local disadvantages; but as in the case of the highly respectable bodies, the coachmakers and hatters, who are in union with their fellow-tradesmen throughout the three kingdoms and consequently have not the management of their local funds, but who have joined our association since our last report, the difficulties against such societies amalgamating with us are easily removed by a separate and voluntary contribution by members.<sup>2</sup>

The local Labourers' Society was advised to correspond with the Durham Labourers' Union, whose executive secretary (an Irishman, to be sure) informed the Dublin trades that "the co-operation of the working classes by a common union was spreading throughout England".<sup>3</sup>

It was in the absence of, not in opposition to, a general British organisation that the Dublin committee resolved:

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid*, Aug 27, 1864 letter from James Hughes, Secretary to Trades' Guardians Association, Waterford

<sup>2</sup> Third semi-annual report cf *Ficeman's Journal*, Sept 9, 1864

<sup>3</sup> *Irish People*, July 2, 1864

That we, the committee of the United Trades Association of Dublin, feel it incumbent upon us to call upon our fellow-tradesmen throughout Ireland to co-operate with us for the protection of trade and the promotion and encouragement of native manufacture, believing that it is by manufacture, fostered and protected, we, as tradesmen, anxious to cling to our country and our families, can raise ourselves from our present unenviable condition. That, in order the better to effect that desirable object, we invite the tradesmen of every city and town in Ireland where three or more trade societies exist to form a union, to be independent of, but in connection with, the United Trades Association of the metropolis, as, from experience, we are confident such organization—knowing neither politics nor religion, but trade and protection of tradesmen's rights alone—would vastly benefit all besides creating that reciprocity of feeling which should ever exist between the handicraftsmen of the various trades still extant in Ireland. That, as tradesmen, Irishmen are not inferior to those of any other country; consequently, it would be the duty of the unions to point out to the public, in their respective localities, the absolute necessity of patronizing the manufacture of their own country in preference to importation, as, unfortunately for our class, such patronage to imported manufactures, has, from time to time, reluctantly obliged myriads of our most skilled fellow-tradesmen to seek that employment abroad which they, for the cause assigned, were unable to procure in the land of their birth<sup>1</sup>

Although Enniskillen, Galway, and Ennis immediately acted on these suggestions,<sup>2</sup> the establishment of the British Trades Union Congress, at Manchester, in 1868, seemed to offer bigger and brighter possibilities than could be hoped for from the Irish project. Even from Limerick a suggestion had already come for "an amalgamation of trades, extending throughout Great Britain and Ireland"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Oct 29, 1864

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Dec 3, 1864

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Aug. 26, 1865

As with organisation, so with policy—particularism not nationalism was the keynote. Despite the insistence on patronage for native manufacture, the word “native” was royally inclusive. The demand that preference be given to drinks from bottles with native-cut corks was persistently endorsed by the United Trades Association. On behalf of the Corkcutters’ Society a deputation was sent to His Grace, Dr. Trench, Archbishop of Dublin, who “repeatedly assured them that the income he derived from this country would be spent in it”. “A show card, to be suspended in the respectable grocers’ and vintners’ establishments throughout the city, in the interest of native-cut corks, consequently serving materially the corkcutters’ body, was ordered to be prepared for next night of meeting”<sup>1</sup>. But this activity was not confined to Ireland: the Dublin Association advised the corkcutters of the three kingdoms to take collective action in pointing out to the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the laws oppressed the home-made article.<sup>2</sup> Bitter complaint was made, however, because a marvelous clock, given by Guinness to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, was imported from England, and a general meeting of the trades was suggested to ensure for the O’Connell statue the use of Irish material and the employment of an Irish artist.<sup>3</sup>

Publicity was the great weapon wielded by the Dublin trades in their efforts to secure the letting of all Irish contracts—whether by Government or by religious and charitable institutions—to fair employers in Ireland and the patronage by the citizens of goods produced or handled by fair employers. Dublin trade unionists had the most sublime faith in the public-spirit and fair-mindedness of their employers and fellow-citizens. For example, a baking firm

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, April 23, 1864

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, May 21, 1864

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, May 28, 1864.



having failed to comply with a reasonable demand that had been preferred by the United Trades Association on behalf of the operative bakers, the committee of the Association was content to trust that the public would shop elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, when members of an affiliated body were locked out by their employers, the Association, after exhausting the resources of negotiation, ultimately agreed to support the men "as far as the association rules permitted"<sup>2</sup> A special levy of one halfpenny per week on each member was maintained for several weeks "in order to assist in supporting the printers locked-out of the Irish Times Newspaper".<sup>3</sup> More typical, however, was the committee's intervention between the chandlers and their employers

The deputation appointed in the interest of the Chandlers' Society reported very favourably the interview with an employer, whose urbanity they cordially acknowledged, and who promised to give a preference to the regular society men, particularly as they had agreed to work the machine introduced by him. The chandlers' body purpose doing the same towards all their employers, and adapt themselves to the improved methods of facilitating business. Already in some of the establishments hitherto employing persons not thoroughly competent to do the work the skilled chandlers have produced employment, and they anticipate good results daily from the new order of things.<sup>4</sup>

In Irish capitalists the Dublin artisans saw their sole salvation.

Resolved—That as a large share of the emigration of the Irish

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, April 30, 1864

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, June 3, 1865

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Dec. 3, 1864. The trades' association of Cork assured these printers of their cooperation when necessary. *Ibid* Dec 17, 1864

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Sept 17, 1864

people to America and other countries is caused by the want of employment among the labouring classes at home, we deem it our bounden and imperative duty to call upon the capitalists of Ireland, and especially of the City of Dublin, to do all they can to arrest the progress of this destructive exodus.<sup>1</sup>

They hotly resented the crochety ponderations of that benevolent visitor to Ireland, Nassau Senior, smuggest of political economists, whose assertion that constant strikes were largely responsible for Irish industrial decline they denied.

It is a notorious fact that strikes are of very frequent occurrence in England, but it is equally notorious that they have caused no decline in English manufactures. There is nothing in the "climate" or "soil" of Ireland to make a cause producing one effect in England produce another in Ireland. Moreover, strikes in England are not seldom characterised by acts of violence, by infernal machines (as at Birkenhead), by explosive bombs (as at Sheffield) which have never marked such occurrences in Ireland. It will not be pretended, we hope, that these characteristics have rendered them better calculated to foster manufactures than the peaceful abstention from such acts in the case of Irish operatives? Neither, we trust, will it be openly maintained that the great rarity of strikes in Ireland, as contrasted with their almost daily occurrence in England, accounts for the decline of manufactures here and their increase there. We deny, then, that strikes are of constant, of frequent or of anything but very rare occurrence in Ireland. We doubt that they at all account for the decline of our manufactures, and we base our denial on the fact that the frequency and occasional violence of strikes in England have caused no decline in English manufactures . . .

The coachmakers specifically and "emphatically" denied Senior's *a priori* allegation that railway carriage building

<sup>1</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Sept 9, 1864. This resolution was adopted at the 3rd semi-annual meeting of the Association and printed as an advertisement on the first page of the *Freeman's Journal*.

had been driven out of the city by their strikes: "so far from striking for wages, they had on one occasion, in order to retain work of that description, voluntarily reduced their wages".<sup>1</sup> Their own opinions as to the reasons for the decline of Irish manufacture were set forth in a letter to Colonel Dunne and the members of the Select Committee on Irish taxation. They urged as the chief cause of decline the taxes pressing most heavily on the peasantry, and the incapacity of the country to produce sufficient food for the population, through the discouragement given to the agricultural population to stay at home.<sup>2</sup>

Politics the trade unionists left to their employers. Only on very special occasions was the attention of the committee of the United Trades Association allowed to be drawn to political subjects. Thus, on the eve of the general election of 1865, the regular weekly meeting was interrupted just long enough to show due courtesy to the claims of employers aspiring to statesmanship.

At this stage of the business a deputation was stated to be in attendance, and requested to be allowed a hearing, the object being to state their views concerning the candidates for parliamentary honours and their claims upon the working classes of the city.

The Chairman said he need scarcely remind the committee that no subject of a political or religious nature could or would be introduced or discussed; but as an intimation had been given that it was merely as employers the deputation would urge the claims of those in whose interests they attended, they could be

<sup>1</sup> *Irish People*, July 2, 1864. Senior asserted that Dawson had been driven out of business by strikes. J. Summers, who had been manager of the railway carriage building department of Dawson's business, sent the U. T. A. a detailed statement in refutation of the economist's allegations. *Ibid*, Aug 20, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> *Irish People*, June 25, 1864. The colonel, in his reply, agreed with the views of the craftsmen. *Ibid*, Aug 6, 1864.

admitted provided the committee unanimously agreed to suspend their business. In that hall they were neutral, and he trusted they would always adhere and confine themselves to the objects they were united for—the promotion of manufactures and the union of tradesmen for mutual advantages, respecting each other's opinions.

The committee agreed, without a dissension, to suspend the business in order to hear the four gentlemen in waiting, who, on admission, respectively urged the claims of Messrs. Pim and Guinness as employers of thousands of workmen, and having their vast wealth embarked in local manufacturing projects. They then retired.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the nature of Irish working-class organisation and philosophy in Fenian days. The reader may be left to form his own opinion of how far the Dublin artisans were guilty of what Lecky has termed the "wild socialistic follies of Fenianism".<sup>2</sup> Radical views were confined to a small assorted group of socialists, atheists, anarchists, and stray Fenians, whose claim to notice consists in the single fact that among their number was the author of the "Red Flag". In the years that followed, projects of industrial revival sank out of sight in view of the revival of the land agitation. The revolutionary element threw itself into that struggle conducted on methods which "would not be disowned by the most advanced Communists".<sup>3</sup>

At the age of thirteen years the British Trades Union

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1865. Cf. also Oct 1, 1864. "The Secretary read a communication signed 'Ireland for the Irish', but as the writer did not favour the committee with his real name and address the letter was destroyed, in accordance with a general custom, the association expecting all documents containing useful information to be also authenticated."

<sup>2</sup> Lecky, *op cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Chez Paddy*, quoted in Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, p. 210. It should be noted that the *Irish World*, chief American mouthpiece of the Land League, is still published under the subtitle "American Industrial Liberator."

Congress ventured on a bold exploit possible only to the compatriots of those who were penetrating darkest Africa. In 1880 Congress held its annual meeting in Dublin. Judging by the tone of the speeches, the delegates from Great Britain were rather surprised that the Irish delegates did not bring their pigs and their shillelaghs to the sessions of Congress. The amazement of the British trade unionists, however, was no greater than that of many Irishmen, who gazed in awe, if not in admiration, at the proceedings of their visitors. Irishmen, accustomed to regard the *London Times* as the "Daily Liar" were not convinced by its pronouncement on the tenth annual Trades Union Congress, "which, if at times somewhat irregular in its proceedings, was, on the whole, moderate in tone and altogether free from anything like bitterness towards employers or invective against society"<sup>1</sup> Though twenty-four Dublin delegates sat in the Congress, the president, a local iron-founder, felt constrained to comment that "there are some of the big strong trades in Dublin who are not with us at this Congress, and their absence is hard to understand. It may be they have taken up wrong notions of the aims of your meeting here in Dublin." Equally deplorable were the unwarranted suspicions of many of the Dublin masters

This Congress [he continued] did not come to Ireland to make an attack on capital—(Hear, hear)—if I thought it did I should not be here. We have no wish to hamper capital in any way, but we do wish and we will maintain that our share in the distribution of wealth shall not be the mite share which capitalists seem to think we are only entitled to. (Applause) . . . We know their [the Dublin masters'] views as to trade unionists, and we know how erroneous they are. If in our early days the 'prentice hands of our forefathers oftentimes resorted to violence to compel a man to join their union, or resorted to

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, Sept 24, 1877.

destroying a master's property, that happily has passed away, thanks to the spread of true trades union principles; and our only weapons to-day are reason and argument, and there is not a dispute that takes place with our employers but we could proclaim it in the broad noon day.<sup>1</sup>

Of the twenty-three Dublin trades societies represented, eleven were branches of amalgamated unions. The other twelve bodies mustered only 2,824 members all told. Only two of them contributed to the funds of the Congress.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with precedent, Congress elected its president and secretary from among the natives of its place of meeting. The Dublin delegate of a powerful and generous amalgamated union was elected president;<sup>3</sup> the representative of one of the largest local unions was elected secretary.<sup>4</sup> The Irish personnel of the Congress included two future "Nationalist" Members of Parliament; one of these<sup>5</sup> was elected to the Standing Orders Committee; the other<sup>6</sup> was later to wield greater influence as Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade. Belfast was not represented.

As usually occurs when Englishmen congregate on Irish soil, a spirit of lofty benevolence animated the English delegates. Thus John G. Prior, of Manchester, "felt it was

<sup>1</sup> President's address, 13th Annual (British) Trades Union Congress: Report, p. 12. "I am convinced they will feel that they have missed a splendid and glorious opportunity... of uniting the trades of Dublin into one solid compact body... For it must be confessed that we have not in this city that Trades Council which it is so essential to have in every large city and as a consequence we are much divided."

<sup>2</sup> The Regular Operative Society of Coopers (300 members) and the Dublin Typographical Provident Association (470 members) contributed £1 each.

<sup>3</sup> John Murphy, Iron Founders of England, Ireland and Wales (£20).

<sup>4</sup> John Ward, Regular Operative Bakers (600 members).

<sup>5</sup> W. Abraham, Carpenters and Joiners Amalgamated Society of Dublin, 1st branch.

<sup>6</sup> J. P. Nannetti, Dublin Typographical Provident Association.

disgraceful that for years past they, of the Congress, speaking in the names of the toilers of the United Kingdom, had not been supported as they ought to have been by their Irish brethren. When he said it was a disgrace, he did not mean so much a disgrace to them as to the trade-unionists of England and Scotland who had not come amongst the people of Ireland to explain the benefits that were to be derived from trade-unionism, and ask for their help in the great work they had in hand." Another English delegate moved.

That this meeting, representing the trade unionists of Dublin, in adopting the foregoing resolution [*re* Boards of Arbitration] emphatically declares that trade unions are in no way aggressive on the rights and privileges of honourable employers, and when loyally carried out are productive of the greatest benefit to both employer and employee

He said he wished "to appeal to the peasantry of Ireland". In England "they had observed with feelings of intense satisfaction that the Irish peasantry had at length awakened and that there was a chance of their presently being dragged from the mire in which they had so long lain and he had to offer to the peasantry of Ireland their congratulations that after such gross injustice they had at length begun to find friends to take them by the hand and lead them out of their trouble" <sup>1</sup>

Naturally the untutored Irishry must not be allowed to fall into the error of supposing that two wrongs make a right. Vengeance must be left to the Lord, and to the officials of His earthly representative, Her Britannic Majesty. Nothing could be sanctioned that might cause distress to sober constitutionalists. Congress having listened to a paper on the "Land Laws of Ireland", an English delegate by

<sup>1</sup> Report of Public Meeting, on inside front cover of Report of 13th Annual Congress.

the historically interesting name of Ball proposed an instruction to the Parliamentary Committee "to use [the] most earnest efforts", in view of the fact that the "land laws in Great Britain and Ireland are unjust and opposed to the interests of the people, to secure the best and earliest legislation on this important question" He concluded the debate "by assuring their Irish friends that in England the people were watching their proceedings with the very deepest interest. (Applause) It might, no doubt, make people uncomfortable when some outrageous people resorted to certain measures, but he could tell them that if they wished to proceed in legal lines they would have the hearty assistance and co-operation of English democracy" <sup>1</sup>

Several other matters of interest to the Irish, such as reform of the jury laws and the extension to Ireland of the Summary Jurisdiction Act, were disposed of by appropriate resolutions. The delegates listened to papers read by scholars from Trinity College, Dublin <sup>2</sup> Congress was in the humour to laugh heartily at the report that the Archbishop of Canterbury had been driven into saying that the objectionable references to trade unionism in books used in the Church of England schools had been written by Archbishop Whately while he was in Dublin, and that as Dublin was in a disturbed state at the time, the words must have been intended to apply to Dublin and not to the trades unions of Great Britain <sup>3</sup>

Whether or not this access of kindness and good humour be attributed to the climate of Ireland, it did not follow that the delegates had escaped their preconceived and befogged

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37

<sup>2</sup> One of these, Dr. Ingram, author of "Who Fears to Speak of '98?", was, like Lord French, an advocate of emigration for the relief of Irish troubles.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.



notions of labour conditions in Ireland. A London delegate moved a Narcissan resolution for the protection of the existing hours of labour. A Glasgow delegate moved an amendment demanding a 51-hour week. Several speeches had been delivered before one of the delegates recollected that they were met as a Congress in Dublin, where, in his trade at least, a 63-hour week obtained. As the mover of the resolution had had no intention of committing Congress to the protection of a 63-hour week, he immediately consented to recast it; a resolution demanding a 54-hour week for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was thereupon unanimously adopted.<sup>1</sup>

At home, English trade unionists did not feel the same tolerance for Irish idiosyncrasies. Though Ireland supplied many of the ablest and most energetic leaders of the British labour movement, she also poured across St. George's Channel a steady stream of unskilled labourers, whose presence constituted a serious menace to the workers native to Great Britain. It was to relieve this pressure that the British trade unions interested themselves in the organisation of Irish workers. The questions brought up by Irish delegates at English Congresses were regarded as unnecessary nuisances, to which attention need be paid only when Congress was engaged in the task of encouraging the Irish to organise in support of the interests of British labour.

The Irish representation at British Trades Union Congresses was scanty. Belfast alone sent delegates with any sort of regularity. Congress paid increasingly little attention to their suggestions. Even before the rise of G.B.S., there was a manifest tendency in England to expect drollery from Irishmen. Ireland was associated with the idea of drink and disturbance. In 1883, in seconding a resolution on the codification of the criminal law, Bowman, of the Bel-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 23-4 and 28.

fast United Trades Council, said "he had a right to be heard as coming from the Emerald Isle. What was objected to had been tried in Ireland, they knew with what result. Happily the state of things which there rendered life and property insecure had passed away." Taunted with an inquiry "whether, as to exceptional legislation, the condition of affairs in Ireland was to be described as normal or abnormal", he "retorted that if such provisions obtained in this country they would render normal a condition of things which was abnormal in Ireland"<sup>1</sup> The laughter that greeted such sallies was not so readily provoked by the suggestion, only two years after the fraternisation in Dublin, that "only when workingmen could bring our legislators to know that they as Englishmen had as much regard for justice to their Irish brethren as for themselves that we should have agrarian outrages stopped" The sharp controversy that ensued was allayed only when a phrase to the effect that Ireland was "governed by coercion after coercion" had been withdrawn.<sup>2</sup>

Even the Irish land question had become tiresome. Michael Davitt, though present at the sessions of the Manchester Congress (1882), was not invited to address the delegates<sup>3</sup> At Nottingham (1883) Joseph Arch protested that the land question was quite as serious in England as in Ireland; the reason Congress heard so much about agrarian discontent in Ireland was that in Great Britain the large towns had absorbed the otherwise starving population<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1883 Report, B T U C, p. 33

<sup>2</sup> 1882 Report, pp 26-7, at this Congress—Manchester—only two Irish delegates attended A Bowman, representing both the Flaxdressers' Trade and Benevolent Union (1200 members) and the Belfast United Trades Council (4000 members), and J Murphy, president of the Dublin Congress (1880), representing the Dublin branch (70 members) of the Ironfounders of England, Ireland and Wales

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 16

<sup>4</sup> 1883 Report, p 37

Congress really could not be bothered trying to understand the Irish question in all its complicated aspects. In 1887 a resolution was introduced.

That this Congress of Trade-unionists of Great Britain and Ireland views with alarm and indignation the suppression of the right of public meeting and freedom of speech as evidenced by the suppression of the meeting of the people at Ennis, on Sunday last, called to express their grievances under which they believe themselves to suffer, and this Congress emphatically condemns such high-handed dealing with a perfectly peaceable and orderly assembly, worthy only of the most despotic and vile government in the world.

When Monro, delegate of the Belfast United Trades Council and solitary representative of Irish trade unionism, moved as an amendment that "This Congress recognizes the necessity of law and order being established in Ireland, and obedience to law being enforced, as preliminary to remedy of their grievances", he was greeted with laughter and overwhelmingly voted down.<sup>1</sup> Irrepressible wags, these Irishmen!

Meanwhile the absorption of Irish unions into the British amalgamateds proceeded apace. Thus, in 1893-4 the seven local societies of shipwrights had joined the Newcastle Association. By 1898, according to the reports of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, there were only ninety-six independent trade unions with a membership of 13,077 in the whole of Ireland. The great majority of the organised workers of Ireland were affiliated with British societies. The linen operatives of the North, having no British society to join, supported some ten local unions, with a total membership (in 1897) of 5,098. The printers of Dublin and Cork, the butchers, bakers, and coopers, the bricklayers and

<sup>1</sup> 1887 Report, pp. 17-18.

masons, plasterers and plumbers, farriers and hairdressers, saddlers and upholsterers, hotel and theatrical employees, glass bottle makers, and a few miscellaneous trades clung to their local unions. Such unions were most numerous in Dublin, where the aggregate membership was over 4,800; Belfast, excluding the linen trade, and Cork had each about 1,100 trade unionists outside the amalgamateds; Clonmel, Drogheda, Dundalk, Kilkenny, Limerick, Londonderry, Sligo, and Waterford were other petty centres of sectional trade unionism. Trades Councils flourished in Belfast, Dublin, and Cork; new ones were being formed in Drogheda, Kilkenny, Limerick, Newry, and Waterford.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the incorporation of Irish trade unionists with British societies, the "new unionism" was slow to affect Ireland. The reason may be sought largely in the crisis in the relations of Irish and British labour.

In 1893, after the lapse of a second period of thirteen years, Congress met again on Irish soil, this time in the "Black North". Ireland was represented by thirty-four delegates; seven of whom represented trades councils, fifteen represented amalgamateds, and twelve represented local unions. Not unnaturally, twenty-seven of the Irish delegates were Belfastmen, with one from Newry; the other six came from Dublin. In its efforts to conciliate Irish interests, this Belfast Congress went to unexpected lengths. The Parliamentary Committee was increased (on the motion of Hugh McManus, delegate of the Belfast branch of the Typographical Association) from eleven members to thirteen, with the provision that one member "shall be a duly qualified member of a trade union in Ireland". This concession failed utterly to achieve the desired end. Even Belfast trade unionists were offended at some of the expressions of their English brothers. Thus, a delegate in pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1898, ciii, [c 9013]

posing a collection on behalf of the striking miners, mal-adroitly suggested that "Ulstermen should do more than entertain". The "unkind insinuation" roused the ire of the delegates of the Belfast Trades Council. Even the president felt it necessary emphatically to endorse the statement that "we subscribe as freely as any similar organisation in England, Scotland, or Wales". Religious sensibilities were inadvertently scratched by the designation of the first Sunday in May for a labour demonstration. "The people of Belfast were not in the habit of holding demonstrations on Sunday" Galling as was this outrage on the most delicate feelings of devout Presbyterians, the attitude of the Congress to such matters as factory inspection in Ireland was more ominous. Though factory and workshop inspection was notoriously neglected in Ireland,<sup>1</sup> Congress declined to heed the appeal of a Belfast baker that it lay special emphasis on the necessity of increasing the number of inspectors in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Worst of all was the tendency manifested, even so early as 1883, to look to the Parnellites at Westminster for advice on Irish matters, despite the statement of Mr Bowman of Belfast "that he had nothing to do with the Irish members of Parliament. He represented trade unionism."<sup>3</sup>

These British Congresses, faced with a multitude of interesting problems, were unable and unwilling to give adequate attention to matters of vital importance to Ireland. Resolutions of mere Irish importance were relegated to the end of the agenda. British labour's interest in Ireland centred more and more in the prevention of the competition, in

<sup>1</sup> Bowman, Belfast, had pointed out to the Nottingham Congress (1883) that in the whole of Ireland there were only three inspectors, whereas the factories and workshops numbered 3,697.

<sup>2</sup> 1893 Report

<sup>3</sup> 1883 Report, p 44

British labour markets, of Irish labour. The inevitable result of years of neglect is reflected in a comparison of wage-scales in the three kingdoms. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants held undisputed sway in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Yet, in 1891, while 57.8% of the railway servants in England and Wales were paid upwards of 20s. per week and only 0.2% were paid less than 10s. per week, in Ireland only 22.8% of the railway servants received more than 20s. per week and 47.8% were paid less than 10s. per week<sup>1</sup>. In view of these considerations and "stimulated by the late alteration of the franchise" of the British Congress,<sup>2</sup> the leading trade unionists of Ireland founded an independent Irish Trades Congress, which held its first annual meeting in Dublin in 1894, attended by 119 delegates from all parts of Ireland.

The British Congress of 1894, held at Norwich and attended by eight delegates from Ireland, took no notice of the new departure. On the contrary, Hugh McManus, one of the delegates from the Belfast United Trades and Labour Council and president of the Parliamentary Committee of the new Irish Congress, moved a resolution (seconded by the Belfast delegate of the Mutual Association of Coopers) that "the time has arrived when, . . . there should be a general amalgamation of the trades councils of the United Kingdom, for the more effective organization of the workers in each country, . . .". John Simmons, secretary of the Dublin United Trades Council, was elected one of a committee of fifteen to draft a scheme for the federation of trade unions. Most striking of all, Richard Sheldon, secretary of the Belfast United Trades and Labour Council, was

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1898, lxxxviii, [Cd 8975].

<sup>2</sup> In 1891 Congress amended Standing Orders to require payment of affiliation fees by societies sending delegates to its annual meetings. *Cf* Report, p. 80

declared elected to the Parliamentary Committee though he was only twenty-first in the number of votes polled, because, under the Standing Orders as amended in Belfast the previous year, there must be an Irish delegate on that body.<sup>1</sup>

During the year, however, the Parliamentary Committee, taking the new development into account, rescinded the provision for special representation of Ireland and determined to exclude Trades Councils from representation at future Congresses.<sup>2</sup> Irish labour leaders took these decisions philosophically enough. In opening the second annual Irish Trades Congress (Cork, 1895), Hugh McManus remarked: "The action of the Parliamentary Committee of the United Trades Congress in England has deprived Trades Councils from representation at future Congresses, and robbed Ireland of her seat on the Parliamentary Committee. Sometimes heaven sends us a blessing in disguise; . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Irish labour issued no Declaration of National Independence; the new Congress was conceived as a much-needed supplement, not as a rival to the British Congress:

. . . For some time past the labour leaders of this country have been sharply criticised by members of amalgamated societies for what they term disloyalty to the parent Congress in founding a purely Irish one. This is not so. We, in common with our brethren throughout the country, recognise with regret the many obstacles which interpose in having Ireland adequately represented at the important annual Conferences of our English and Scotch brethren. Compared with the big amalgamations upon the other side of the Channel, the Unions of Ireland can badly bear the expense of sending representative delegations to those Congresses; and even when the Trades Councils in

<sup>1</sup> Cf 27th Annual Report.

<sup>2</sup> Cf 28th Annual Report. The Committee's action was violently represented by many delegates, but for reasons quite unconnected with Ireland; its decision had been reached only by the casting vote of the Chairman.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Second Irish Trades Congress, p. 5

the larger centres of industry, such as Dublin and Belfast, from time to time send delegates thereto, the advantages accruing to the Unions of Ireland have scarcely been commensurate with the expense incurred. But the fault lay not with the handful of Irish delegates. Like the Imperial Parliament, the English Congressional machine has become overladen with the multifarious duties and interests committed to its care. It has gone on from year to year, with the rapid growth of the Trade Union movement, gathering largely increased membership with correspondingly increased responsibilities, until it may be said to have outgrown its own strength to cope successfully with the work which pressed upon it from all sides. Moreover, the industries of England and Scotland, as compared with those of Ireland, being almost entirely of a mining and manufacturing character, it may seem obvious that their representatives should predominate in—as in truth they largely dominate—that Congress. To expect, then, that a few representatives from Ireland could hope to make any practical impression upon an institution which has already become unwieldy, would be to expect the impossible. I cannot, of course, find fault with our English and Scotch friends in pressing forward their own claims first—that is quite natural, seeing that their interests are in the main identical, and the facilities at their disposal favourable; they cannot be expected to understand the wants of a community largely agricultural, assisting in reviving the languishing manufactures of Ireland. Our only remedy, our only chance of effectively arresting the attention of the powers that be to the condition of Irish industry and Irish labour, is to maintain our own Annual Congress and our own Parliamentary Committee (applause). Moreover, a further incentive to Irish trade unionists to promote and extend the scope and operations of their own Congress lies in the fact that the Parliamentary Committee of the English Institution recently decided to practically exclude Irish representation henceforth. We are thus thrown upon our own resources, and with that object we are assembled here to-day. . . . <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p 11 (President's address).



With rare exceptions, the representatives of Irish trade unionism ceased to attend British Congresses. A few of the amalgamated unions from time to time included in their delegations an official domiciled in Ireland. The Belfast Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators Society sent a representative to the Edinburgh Congress (1896) for the special purpose of securing the condemnation of the National Amalgamated Society of House and Ship Painters and Decorators. The amalgamated union, over-anxious to absorb the membership of the local society, had permitted its members to work in shops at which the Belfast Society had struck, and had further allowed its members to work for less wages than had been agreed upon by the employers and the local operatives' association. On proofs being adduced, Congress expelled the delegate of the offending society, though he evoked considerable sympathy by his counter-complaint that the Belfast Society demanded no less than £3 entry money from members of his society.<sup>1</sup> For other than such extraordinary purposes, the voice of Irish labour was thenceforth expressed only through its own organisations.

<sup>1</sup> 29th Annual Report, B. T. U. C.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE "OLD UNIONISM"

THE resentment of some of the amalgamated societies at Irish disloyalty seriously embarrassed the infant Irish Trades Congress. Richard Sheldon, member of the Parliamentary Committee both of the English and of the Irish Congress, felt it necessary at the second Irish Congress (1895) to move.

That it be an instruction from this Congress to all delegates present, belonging to the various English and Scotch Trade and Labour Organisations, to insist on their right to send a representative (who shall be a member of a branch in Ireland), to the Irish Trades' Union Congress. The expenses of said representative to be paid out of general fund

"He said certain standing orders of the last United Trades' Congress of England had the effect of ostracising the Irish representatives, and at present it was utterly impossible that Ireland could have the representatives on English Parliamentary Committees" The resolution was seconded by a delegate of a Dublin branch of the Amalgamated Carpenters,<sup>1</sup> warmly supported by a member of the (Amalgamated) Shipwrights' Association, and adopted by Congress.<sup>2</sup>

The 121 delegates at this Cork Congress represented 53 unions (24 of which had their headquarters in Great Britain) and 7 trades councils. Dublin and Cork were repre-

<sup>1</sup> T. O'Connell, who had presided over the First Irish Trades Congress, Dublin, 1894

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Second Irish Trades Congress, Cork, 1895

sented by 43 delegates each,<sup>1</sup> Belfast and Limerick each sent 13 delegates; other localities represented were Waterford, Clonmel, Kilkenny, Athlone, Drogheda, and Derry. One delegate, representing the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, came from Liverpool.

The income of Congress was derived, exclusive of delegates' fees, from the voluntary subscriptions of affiliated societies. In 1895, only two amalgamated societies contributed: the Typographical Association subscribed £5, the General Union of Carpenters gave £2. Of the remaining £50 10s. received by this Congress, Belfast contributed £28—£10 from the Trades Council, £16 from five local societies, and £2 from the local branch of the Typographical Association; Dublin £13 10s.—£7 from the Trades Council, £5 10s. from three local societies, and £1 from the local branch of the Consolidated Bookbinders, Limerick £7, and Drogheda £2. Such powerful British unions as the Amalgamated Carpenters, United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers, National Union of Dock Labourers, Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, and Amalgamated Society of Tailors, though liberally represented at Congress, were unable, owing to the aloofness of their executives, to contribute to the funds.

Just as many Irish middle-class patriots had besought English capitalists to invest their surplus funds in Ireland rather than in South America or Africa, so Irish trade unionists strained every nerve to induce their English brethren to invest a portion of their capital in the work of labour organisation in Ireland. The character and activities of the Congress cannot be better described than they are in the introduction written for the Report of the Fourth Annual Congress (Waterford, 1897) by P. J. Leo, pork butcher of that city and president of that Congress.

<sup>1</sup> The town in which Congress met was always disproportionately represented, of course.

The Fourth Annual Irish Trades' Union Congress, which was held at Waterford, has amply fulfilled the expectations formed of it, both for its intellectual and representative character, and testifies beyond any doubt the necessity that exists for the holding of this annual Parliament of Labour. Like all other Congresses its object is to educate the workers and inculcate the principle of "Self-Reliance". Its deliberations engage public attention, and its debates focus public opinion on labour questions that otherwise might forever have lain in obscurity or have drifted beyond the region of thought. If it had done nothing else but to bring together into bonds of unity the two local societies which were, to their own detriment, so long apart, it would have conferred a lasting and substantial benefit on this city. But it has done good in other ways. It has shown the employers that though representing such a powerful army of workers as 50,000 men, that the demands set forth are just and reasonable both; that the representatives of the workers of Ireland are tolerant and broadminded; that their motto is "Defence not Defiance"; that the object of every Trades' Congress is to promote and cultivate better relations between the employer and employee, and to such an extent has this principle been understood and appreciated in the city of the *Urbs Intacta* that "those who came to laugh remained to pray". By adopting the broad principle of co-operation amongst the workers, it has swept away those provincial barriers and removed that insular prejudice, which unfortunately too frequently divided Irishmen, by proclaiming in an authoritative manner that it speaks not on behalf of any city or province, but for and on behalf of the whole of Ireland. Through the agency of Trades' Congresses the attention of Parliament has been directed to questions of paramount importance to the workers, such as the Employers' Liability Bill, Technical Education, the Municipal Franchise, etc., and other measures equally as needful and important which have from time to time engaged the attention of the Legislature. But a trades Congress has still another very important function to fulfil, namely, the organisation of the workers, and in places

in which it has been held it has left traces of its usefulness in this respect behind. To this end, since its institution in Ireland, it has applied itself with remarkable energy and success, with the result that each succeeding year finds it having an increased role of representation.

It is now four years since the labour leaders in Ireland conceived the idea of holding Irish Trades' Congresses to deal with questions purely Irish, which, from the very nature of their surroundings, could not be treated as satisfactorily by an English Trades' Congress, and by so doing to supplement rather than clash with the efforts of our brethren across the water. The project at the time was fraught with many difficulties, financially and otherwise, but as time rolled on these difficulties have gradually disappeared, and each succeeding Congress has been more successful (if that were possible) than its predecessor. The fact of our Scotch brothers having followed our example by holding a Scotch Congress, proves the wisdom of the course adopted.

The resolutions submitted to Congress, though embracing the whole phase of the labour question, were remarkably alike for their moderation and practicability, and the opinion of the representative gentlemen of the city (who are large employers themselves) that they endorsed every one of the resolutions on the agenda, proved that the men who met at Congress meant business in seeking the substance rather than the shadow.

It is therefore manifest that the holding of an annual Irish Trades' Congress is not only essential but absolutely imperative, and the success of its propaganda will depend to a large extent and in the same proportion as it derives support from the workers themselves. True it is that each succeeding year finds the difficulties that at first beset it have almost disappeared, but it is evident something must be done to lighten the burden of the local committees in the districts in which it is proposed to be held by levying the amount necessary to defray the expenses over a larger area, and any surplus that may then remain to be controlled by the Parliamentary Committee, and placed to the credit of next Congress. It has been estimated that the

last Congress represented 50,000 workers. Now if each of these subscribed the sum of one penny per annum it would realize £208 16s. 8d, which would be more than sufficient to sustain in an independent manner the carriage of the Irish Trades' Congress. As organisation is one of its primary objects, by that means Congresses could have been held in centres badly in the need of organisation—in places unable to meet the financial requirements.

With the growing intelligence of the workers of Ireland and the consequent expansion of their ideas regarding their duties and responsibilities, a better feeling is certain to prevail between capital and labour, and the old time-worn and barbarous method of strikes, will soon become as obsolete as the hand-loom or the flint-lock. Mutual confidence and mutual self-respect are both important factors in bringing about this much desired end. Trades-unionism is marching rapidly on the road of progress; its influence is felt in every land, and is as boundless as the ocean, and its power, if used judiciously, is as irresistible as the waves that break upon our shores.

In the Franchise the sceptre of authority has passed for ever from the peer to the peasant, and if the power thus vested in the workers is used moderately, consistently, and firmly, the Irish Trades' Congress will not have met in vain, and the sun of prosperity will again brilliantly shine on a happy and contented people.<sup>1</sup>

Already the great amalgamated societies had become the largest contributors to the funds of Congress. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants gave £10 out of its Parliamentary Committee Fund; the Amalgamated Society of Tailors similarly gave £5.<sup>2</sup> By 1905, the last year in

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Fourth Annual Irish Trades' Union Congress, Waterford, 1897

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* The 86 delegates to this Congress represented 36 trade bodies (including 14 amalgamated societies or their branches) and 8 trades councils. Dublin sent 30 delegates, Waterford 15, Belfast and Limerick 13 each, Cork 9, Clonmel and Kilkenny two each, and Derry and Drogheda one each.

which Congress depended on voluntary subscriptions for its "sustentation", the executives of amalgamated unions contributed £23 8s. 1d., Irish branches of amalgamateds £5 15s. 11d., trades councils £11 10s., and independent Irish unions £16 15s.<sup>1</sup> The penny-a-head rule adopted at the Wexford Congress (1905) did not appreciably affect the proportion contributed by the amalgamated executives; in 1906, out of total affiliation fees of £74 4s 8d, £30 19s. was paid by English executives.<sup>2</sup>

The skilled trades, notably the printers, carpenters, and tailors, dominated the Congress.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the committee elected in 1895, no "labourer" was able to secure a seat on the Parliamentary Committee until 1906. Dublin was most heavily represented in the governing body, though rarely commanding a majority. Belfast ranked second in number of members, but vied with Dublin in influence exerted. Cork, Derry, and Limerick almost invariably obtained one seat each.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of Twelfth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, Wexford, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> 13th Annual Report. The penny-a-head rule did not apply strictly: societies with more than 250 members but less than 500 were assessed as of 340; societies with more than 500 members but less than 1000 paid as on a membership of 360, after the first 1000 members the fee was fixed at £1 per thousand or fraction thereof. Trades councils were assessed £1 for every 5000 members represented. In consequence the contributions of the Railway Servants, Typographical Association, and Amalgamated Painters were actually reduced, on the other hand, several amalgamateds which had theretofore accepted representation without financial expenditure were now compelled to contribute—notably the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, whose affiliation fees came to £5 10s.

<sup>3</sup> The Railway Servants, though less active, usually managed to keep a representative on the Parliamentary Committee. It will be noted that the workers at these trades belonged to amalgamated unions, with the exception of the Dublin printers.

<sup>4</sup> Only once did Belfast fail to secure the election of a representative

For fourteen years Congress continued its placid existence, engaged in "one of the most patriotic and most Christian duties any man can perform".<sup>1</sup> It listened gratefully to the annual urbane welcomes of divers mayors and lord mayors, "wearing the chain and robes of office and attended by mace and sword-bearers", and of the principal local employers. It applauded the unctuous platitudes of P.P.'s and M.P.'s alike. It heard the Dean of Clonmacnoise wish it "fair weather and a pleasant time in the historic old capital of the Midlands", it was pleased when the Presbyterian divine "contented himself with saying ditto", especially comforting was a Reverend Father's reminder of the beneficial effects of Church holidays.<sup>2</sup> The delegates took their friends to visit Guinness' Brewery, "and were hospitably entertained by the directors".<sup>3</sup> Their own hospitality evoked the appreciation of such a connoisseur as Mr Samuel Gompers.<sup>4</sup>

Congress did not meet "to discuss abstract questions of

on the P.C. At Wexford (1905) there was a tie between Daly, Dublin, and M'Manus, Belfast, both printers, as under Standing Orders two men of the same trade could not be elected, a further vote was taken and M'Manus defeated. An attempt, in 1901, to amend the Standing Orders in such fashion as to limit Dublin and Belfast to two seats each and other towns to one was defeated only by the casting vote of the chairman, A. Bowman, Belfast Trades Council.

<sup>1</sup> Chairman M'Manus in opening the 2nd Irish Trades Congress, Cork, 1895. Cf. Report.

<sup>2</sup> Addresses of welcome to 13th Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, Athlone, 1906. Cf. McCarron's speech of thanks for welcome at Wexford (1905). "The delegates would like to see the clerical representation of all denominations at their meetings, for clerical influence often had prevented great industrial wars." In 1906 Hudson "rejoiced to see Mr. Baile (Chairman of the Athlone Urban District Council) and the leading townsmen standing together on the same platform with the clergymen of all denominations."

<sup>3</sup> 1907 Report, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> 1910 Report, p. 12.



political economy".<sup>1</sup> The delegates were glad to have the assurance of a member of Parliament that, though it was "their duty to exercise the prerogative that was in them to teach the masses the strength and the power they possessed, because the power was in their hands if they only chose to use it", this was "no new doctrine. It was not socialism".<sup>2</sup> "These gentlemen — cool-headed, moderate men, practical men, fully alive to the responsibility of the position they held as representing such a powerful organisation"<sup>3</sup> — "recognised that under the present social system there must be capitalists, and they were not opposed to capitalists, but were there to devise means whereby they might get a fair share of the capital and wealth they helped to create".<sup>4</sup> Even in 1909 they gloried in the thought that "This Congress was started sixteen years ago when trades unionism was looked on as akin to violence, but now the public and the employers look upon trades unionism as a boon and blessing to the workingmen of the country".<sup>5</sup>

The time-honoured theory of the need of the industrial development of Ireland was never forgotten. The very first report of the Parliamentary Committee called attention to the possibilities of tourist development.<sup>6</sup> In 1901, Mr. Wyndham, Chief Secretary for Ireland, in his reply to a deputation from the Congress, remarked that Mr Bowman (Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee) said " . . . that they should be very careful in dealing with these trades, that while trying to protect the workman from injury they

<sup>1</sup> Opening address of the chairman of the P. C., Cork, 1895

<sup>2</sup> Address of welcome by Mr. Crean, M. P., Cork, 1895

<sup>3</sup> Mayor Stafford's address of welcome, Wexford, 1905

<sup>4</sup> Chairman's opening address, Athlone, 1906

<sup>5</sup> Address of welcome, Limerick, 1909

<sup>6</sup> Report of Second Irish Trades Congress, p. 10.

should not inflict injury on the trade itself. He [Mr. Wyndham] was glad to hear that, because in Belfast last Saturday he had the pleasure of going over some of the linen works, and he was very much interested by what he saw there, and he felt it would be very rash indeed if they did anything to imperil what was the last stronghold of that industry.”<sup>1</sup> In 1902, though Irish brewers could not be induced to demand that the government let its Irish canteen contracts in Ireland, it was resolved, on the motion of a Dublin cooper, seconded by a Cork cooper

That this Congress of Irish workers enters its most earnest protest against the action of the military authorities in giving the contract for porter and ale to the Burton Brewery Company, in face of the well-known fact that the best porter in the world is brewed in Dublin and other parts of Ireland, and we view their action as a gross injustice to the Irish brewery industry and a serious injury to the mechanics and labourers employed in these establishments.<sup>2</sup>

In vain did Keir Hardie, at Newry (1903), counsel that

labour . . . should make sure that when the industries of Ireland came to be developed it should not mean as it so often meant, the further demoralisation and degradation of the nation, but should, through their development, bring benefit and peace and prosperity to every section of the community. That meant that the development of Irish industry must be on Nationalist or Socialist, as distinguished from the commercial or capitalist lines.<sup>3</sup>

Another Scotsman addressed himself to equally deaf ears at Wexford (1905) .

<sup>1</sup> 8th Annual Report, Sligo, 1901, p. 29

<sup>2</sup> Report of 9th Annual Congress, Cork, 1902, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 10th Annual Congress, Newry, 1903, p. 19

In England and Scotland they have developed their industries, but the mere development of industries was not going to be the social salvation of the common people of the country. . . . The social salvation of the workers depended on the share of the fruits of their labour that the workers received <sup>1</sup>

More intelligible to Irish trade unionists was the definition of their aims and purposes supplied by the Dublin saddler who presided at the Wexford Congress of 1905. <sup>2</sup>

I am mindful of the fact that we meet this year in a town in which the aims and purpose of the Irish Trades Union Congress are somewhat imperfectly understood, and I should therefore like to make it absolutely clear that our mission is essentially one of peace as between employers and employed, provided always that both elements which go to make up the industrial life of the nation obtain their respective rewards. It has been said that the effective organisation of the wealth-producers results only in raising their minds to revolt against the conditions under which they are sometimes obliged to labour, and with disastrous consequences to the industries associated with the district concerned. That is unfortunately true in a few ill-directed instances; but I should be false to the position to which you have to-day elected me if I did not raise my voice against advice in that direction given by irresponsible persons presuming to act in the name of trade-unionism. We who are identified with the Trade Union Congress deprecate movements of this character. We discountenance disputes between employers and employed born of ulterior motives of interested and self-elected agitators. We recognise and support only those demands that tend to secure to the worker at least a living wage, a just percentage of the profits of his toil—in short, a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, whether that work be for the State, the local authority, or the private employer.

<sup>1</sup> Dan Baird, fraternal delegate from Scottish Trades Union Congress, *cf.* Report, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> James Chambers. *Cf.* 12th Annual Report.

Seldom was the calm of their deliberation ruffled by a nor'easterly gust. A favourite resolution of Irish coach-makers called for the limitation of Lord Mayors' terms of office and prohibition of two consecutive terms. At Sligo (1901) Belfast flared up in resentment at any such attempt to dictate to that fair city with what frequency it should honour its citizens with the chief magistracy.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally there was a back-draught. At Newry (1903) the Belfast Trades Council brought in a resolution in favour of non-sectarian education under the control of an elected body. Amid protests from Derry, Cork, and Dublin at the introduction of a "question of religion", the resolution was rejected.<sup>2</sup>

Even more alarming to the delegates was a motion put before the Cork Congress (1895)

that in the opinion of this Congress the ultimate solution of the labour problem is to be found in the nationalisation of land, also the means of production, distribution, and exchange.

The mover of this resolution, James McCarron, a Derry tailor, argued that:

It was labour created capital, but it did not get its fair share of profit. Labour was the motive power of commerce, and not capital, which was merely the fruit of the tree of labour. He contended the nationalisation of the land would bring the people back into a more natural and healthy existence, and would avoid such scenes as the distribution of relief from the soup kitchens of Belfast, a great and prosperous commercial centre.

The president of the Belfast Trades Council, Alex Taylor, started up in horror "at a resolution of such sweeping character".

<sup>1</sup> Eighth Annual Report

<sup>2</sup> Tenth Annual Report, pp 47-8.

Some people thought that they would produce a millenium—a sort of paradise of labour—if their pocket programme of idealism were placed upon the Statute Book. The resolution meant that private property was a thing that could not exist (applause).

The president of the Dublin Trades Council, E. L. Richardson, also rose to oppose "this resolution that practically said that trade unionism is played out". To calm the storm that threatened to wreck the fair hopes of substantial trade unionists, Wm. Field, M.P., rose to speak with all the authority of a man of sound common sense and high position.

If his opinion of the men present was correct, they were all practical men, desirous of obtaining something that was reasonable—that was within their grasp (Hear, hear). He was entirely in favour of the nationalisation of the land, but he hoped in the interest of labour, that the Congress would negative the resolution. . . . The theory of socialism was all right if they had to deal with angels and not with human nature.

Though a Dublin printer remarked that "Socialism might be bad, but it could not be worse than the present condition of things", and McCarron "contended that a co-operative commonwealth was not an impossibility, it was the only way to prevent social injustice", Congress defeated the proposal by a vote of 57 to 25.<sup>1</sup>

Though McCarron persisted in moving pious resolutions in favour of land nationalisation, and was even guilty, at Newry (1903), of repudiating "the statement that the interests of employers and employed were identical", as "they

<sup>1</sup>Second Annual Report. In the 8th Annual Report (1901) are to be found brief sketches of the leading figures in these early Congresses. It is there stated. "In labour questions Mr. McCarron has a leaning to what is by some considered the extreme side"

would not belong to human nature if that were so",<sup>1</sup> Congress continued, year after year, to pass resolution after resolution. To a delegate who "asked why should they pass a resolution embodying a matter in reference to which they had no power to compel societies to carry it out", McCarron phlegmatically replied that "they passed many resolutions at that Congress, and they were not so egotistical as to think that they could enforce compliance with them all".<sup>2</sup> The Irish Congress was duly modest about its achievements. At Wexford (1905) the president, having reviewed the labour legislation of the preceding decade, continued.

I do not suggest that the Irish Trades Congress has been instrumental in securing the passage of all or any of these measures; but I think I can fairly claim that our existence in no small degree contributed to the results. It is admitted that since our foundation Irish representative men of all political parties have displayed a more practical interest in questions affecting the welfare of organised Labour both here and across the Channel—but especially in Ireland. Why? Because, before the inception of the Irish Congress members of Parliament for Irish constituencies had no reliable means of ascertaining the collective desires of the wealth-producers, and as a consequence the oft-times discordant voice of the workers was to them but a negligible quantity. But now the position is changed.<sup>3</sup>

Only when political or ecclesiastical issues were raised did the delegates lose their tempers; on such occasions they invariably did so. Irish trade unionists had long been aware

<sup>1</sup> "The employers tried to get as much work as they could for a certain amount of wages, and the workers tried to get as much wages as they could for a certain amount of work" Speech in moving thanks for the welcome by the Urban Council.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Fourth Annual Congress, Waterford, 1897

<sup>3</sup> Twelfth Annual Report, p. 7

of the peril of politics. Addressing the thirteenth British United Trades Congress, Dublin (1880), the president had urged that "the labour representation question brings us a common platform which is so much needed in this country: a platform on which we could all unite, no matter what our opinion on politics".<sup>1</sup> Again at the twenty-sixth Congress, Belfast (1893), the president described trade unionism as

the "ism", amongst all others, whose mission it shall be to free our unhappy land from the terrible incubus of religious bigotry and political intolerance, which have hitherto been the means of separating into hostile camps those who should be brethren, and who should dwell together in unity and peace. Is it too much to say that those twin demons—religious bigotry and political intolerance—have too often been used by interested parties, have been too often aided and abetted, instead of being condemned and discouraged, on the well-understood principle of "divide and conquer"? That the uniting of different creeds and politics under the banner of trade-unionism is no dream, but a truth which may be realised, we have had from time to time abundant proof; one instance of which I may be pardoned for alluding to.<sup>2</sup>

In accord with this conviction and in harmony with the attitude adopted by the Dublin United Trades Association in the Fenian period, the Irish Trades Congress strove to maintain neutrality in politics. In the words of the president of its first Parliamentary Committee. "We have met today to look after our material interests, not to promote

<sup>1</sup> Thirteenth Annual Report, British Trades Union Congress, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-sixth Annual Report, British Trades Union Congress, p. 25. On May 5, 1892, a labour demonstration had been held in Belfast to assist the linenlappers to obtain better conditions of employment; on that occasion "Orange and Green blended in a true union". He claimed to have it from responsible officers of the police that "the demonstration referred to did more to assist them in keeping the peace than any incident which occurred in their experience"

the interests of any party, sect, or clique, but to strengthen and extend the cause of labour—by trade unionists, for trade unionists.”<sup>1</sup> In 1909, it was deemed matter for hearty congratulation that “they had united the men of what they used to call the Black North with the men of the warm-hearted South and with those of the East and West, and when they had succeed[ed] in doing that he thought they had given a lesson to other Irishmen to go and do likewise”<sup>2</sup>

Yet neutrality was proving difficult to maintain in the face of a growing Sinn Féin sentiment among a section of the Dublin workers. This group resented the fact that cross-channel executives wielded absolute power over the funds of the amalgamated unions. A sharp cleavage developed at the Athlone Congress (1906) over a resolution calling for the formation of an Irish Trade Union Federation.<sup>3</sup> Members of amalgamated unions from one end of Ireland to the other denounced the proposal as impracticable. “The great bulk of the amalgamated unions in Ireland”, said a Belfast delegate,<sup>4</sup> “were already affiliated with the General Federation of Trades Unions”. A Cork man<sup>5</sup> “could say with authority that Ireland was receiving ten times more money than ever she sent across the water”. A Dubliner<sup>6</sup> said his trade received from the British Fed-

<sup>1</sup> Opening speech of Hugh M'Manus, Report of Second Irish Trades Congress

<sup>2</sup> Address of welcome, Report of 16th Annual Congress, Limerick, 1909, p. 21

<sup>3</sup> The resolution was moved by M. Leahy, a delegate of the Limerick Trades Council. A strong argument against him was advanced by McCarron, who stated that his society, the Amalgamated Tailors, had spent £5000 in Dublin and £3000 in Leahy's own city “in fighting the master tailors”.

<sup>4</sup> George Greig, National Amalgamated Union of Labour.

<sup>5</sup> P. Lynch, Amalgamated Society of Tailors.

<sup>6</sup> J. T. Duignan, Brassfounders.



eration "fifteen times the amount they paid into it. . His society would not give up that benefit." A Belfast baker<sup>1</sup> said he would have to look in his Encyclopedia to see if Mr. Daly, the chief supporter of the resolution, was correct—"whether Ireland was British or not". By a vote of 40 to 14, Congress adopted an amendment urging on "all Trade and Labour Unions throughout Ireland the desirability of becoming affiliated with the General Federation of Trades Unions".

The following year, at Dublin (1907), Congress endorsed a rebuke administered by the Parliamentary Committee to the Cumann na nGaedheal for urging on trade unionists the formation of an Irish Federation of Trade Unions<sup>2</sup> But, though anxious to solidify the labour movement in Great Britain and Ireland, Congress had definitively declined to consider seriously the invitation extended from London (July 17, 1900) and "again be part and parcel of the British Trades Union Congress as in days of yore"<sup>3</sup>

Definitely political questions raised the warmest animosities among the delegates. Even a motion "that this Congress of Irish workers join in the protest made by every Party in Ireland, regardless of creed or politics, against the continued and monstrous overtaxation of this country, as compared with England, and to express the hope that the finding of the Financial Relations Commission will be carried into practical effect" and calling "upon the Irish members of Parliament to resist every attempt to shelve this ques-

<sup>1</sup> E Deane, Belfast Operative Bakers.

<sup>2</sup> Fourteenth Annual Report, p 14

<sup>3</sup> Report of 8th Annual Congress, Sligo, 1901, pp 20-21 The letter from Sam Woods, secretary of the British Congress, and the resolution unanimously adopted by the Irish Parliamentary Committee are there printed in full. So late as 1910, however, a resolution was introduced at the Irish Congress in favour of amalgamation with the British Congress "the previous question" was carried only by 23 votes to 15.

tion", though seconded by the president of the Belfast Trades Council, evoked a protest from a Belfast delegate<sup>1</sup> The need for labour representation on local public bodies was not a contentious question and resolutions in favour of striving to attain the fullest possible control of all the organs of local government evoked no opposition. The promotion of such representation was left in the hands of the several trades councils, very often with undesirable results.<sup>2</sup> At Sligo (1901), it was deemed necessary to affirm "That this Congress calls upon all elected representatives of Labour to observe the urgent necessity of abstaining in their representative capacity from supporting the nominee of any political party unless such nominee has been approved of by the local trades council, trade union, or other recognised Labour organisation".<sup>3</sup> The real trouble began only in 1904 At the Cork Congress (1902) P. T. Daly, of the Dublin Trades Council, had carried an addendum to a re-affirmation of the Sligo resolution, calling for the formation of "a pledge bound labour party, controlled by, and

<sup>1</sup> S. Monro, who had presided over the British Congress at its meeting in Belfast in 1893 His objection was on the ground of insufficient evidence. On the other hand, McCarron objected to the number of soldiers in Ireland: "They were peaceful in Ireland, and the country had no right to pay for them" Fourth Annual Report, Waterford, 1897.

<sup>2</sup> "It soon became evident, however, that these men were utterly unfitted to maintain an independent, incorruptible, party They became involved in the intrigues and jobbery of the dominant political factions, and vied with the men they were elected to fight in getting jobs for their friends and relations, promoting testimonials to themselves, and feathering their nests generally. As a result, the workers became thoroughly disgusted with Labour Representation, the desire for an independent Party of Labour was killed, and the movement, as a whole, suffered through the discredit and dishonour of those it had elected And so ended the first Dublin Labour Party, 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung,' and for almost a generation the Dublin workers lost faith in Labour Representation." From circular letter of the Dublin Trades Council "To the Officers and Members of all Affiliated Unions", May 24, 1919

<sup>3</sup> Eighth Annual Report, p. 56

answerable to, the Irish Trades Union Congress".<sup>1</sup> The Parliamentary Committee had ignored this instruction, as "it was a most difficult matter to formulate any scheme at the present time which would be acceptable to the workers".<sup>2</sup> At Newry (1903), instead of renewing its instruction to the Parliamentary Committee, Congress heartily recommended to the trade unions of Ireland "an immediate affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee to promote the formation of independent labour representation in Ireland"<sup>3</sup>

From 1904 on a bitter struggle over the respective merits of the Nationalist and the Labour Parties became a regular feature of the Congress' proceedings. The growing sentiment in favour of political action received a tremendous impetus from the success of the Labour Party at the polls in 1906. Congress, however, found it very difficult to decide whether Irish trade unionists should affiliate with the English party or seek to achieve their ends through the medium of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Thus, at Athlone (1906) was staged a most acrimonious debate, filled with the bitterest personal references, on a resolution calling for affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee and an amendment in favour of relying on the Irish Party. The closure having been applied, Congress defeated the amendment by 31 votes to 17, and completed the transaction by defeating the original resolution by a vote of 33 to 18.<sup>4</sup>

Socialism had only the most precarious toehold in Ireland. Both the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party

<sup>1</sup> Ninth Annual Report, pp 42-3. The original motion stood in the name of the Belfast Trades Council. The amendment was carried by a vote of 45 to 12.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Tenth Annual Congress, Newry, 1903, p 38.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Tenth Annual Congress, Newry, 1903, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Thirteenth Annual Report.

had formed branches in Dublin, but the term of their existence was measured in months. It remained for an Irishman brought up in Scotland to formulate the philosophy of the self-reliant Irish labour movement. In 1896, James Connolly, an Ulsterman born, was to embark on a truly desperate venture.<sup>1</sup> When the future leader of self-conscious Irish labour was but ten years old, his family had been compelled to emigrate from Monaghan to Scotland. Here young Connolly was immediately caught in the toils of the industrial system. After a series of bitter experiences as printer's devil, factory-hand, tramp, navvy, and peddler, Connolly inherited his father's position as corporation dustman in Edinburgh. A voracious reader of history and economics, he had imbibed a fervent nationalism from contact with his uncle, an old Fenian. On this background the influence of John Leslie, a zealous propagandist of the Social Democratic Federation, sufficed to produce the most ardent enthusiasm for the principles of revolutionary socialism. In protest against the victimisation of his brother by the corporation, Leslie's young disciple stood as Socialist candidate at a municipal election, polling 20 per cent. of the votes of the constituency. His contest had cost him his job; an attempt to set up as a cobbler failed, and Connolly, who had married in 1891, was again reduced to the most desperate straits. In this crisis he had practically completed arrangements with the Chilean government to emigrate to a South American farm, when Leslie suggested as an alternative, that Connolly, then twenty-six years old, return to Ireland to undertake the organisation of an Irish Socialist Party.

The attempt succeeded, though slow in producing visible results. Gathering around him a tiny group of enthusiasts, Connolly launched the Irish Socialist Republican Party. Its programme demanded.

<sup>1</sup> The most recent and complete account of Connolly's life and work is *James Connolly*, by Desmond Ryan (Dublin & London, 1924).

The establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic, based upon the public ownership by the people of Ireland of the land and instruments of production, distribution, and exchange. Agriculture to be administered as a public function under boards of management elected by the agricultural population, and responsible to them and to the nation at large. All other forms of labour necessary to the well-being of the community to be conducted on the same principles.

As a means of organising the forces of democracy in preparation of any struggle which may precede its realisation, of paving the way for the realisation of our ideal, of restricting the tide of emigration by providing employment at home, and finally of palliating the present social system, we work by political means to secure the following measures.

(1) Nationalisation of canals and railways.

(2) Abolition of private banks and money-lending institutions, and establishment of State banks under popularly elected boards of directors, issuing loans at cost.

(3) Establishment at public expense of rural depots for the most improved agricultural machinery, to be lent out to the agricultural population at a rent covering cost and management alone.

(4) Graduated income tax on all incomes over £400 per annum, in order to provide funds for pensions to the aged, infirm widows, and orphans.

(5) Legislative restriction of hours of labour to 48 per week and establishment of a minimum wage.

(6) Free maintenance of all children.

(7) Gradual extension of the principle of public ownership and supply to all the necessities of life.

(8) Public control and management of the national schools by boards elected by popular ballot for that purpose alone.

(9) Free education up to the highest University degree.

(10) Universal suffrage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This programme has been reprinted in D. Ryan, *James Connolly, op. cit.*, pp. 19-20

Connolly's nominal salary as party organiser of £1 a week was paid with extreme irregularity. Had it not been for pauper breakfasts at the Mendicity Institution and the devoted efforts of a volunteer staff, socialist journalism would have been impossible. In the face of almost overwhelming odds, the *Workers' Republic*, founded in 1898, struggled on with fair regularity until May, 1903.<sup>1</sup>

What the Irish Socialist Republican Party lacked in numerical and financial strength was more than compensated for by the energy and ability of its founder. "James Connolly and his comrades went forth with the zeal of crusaders, with all the magnetic passion of religious fervour, a small and somewhat doctrinaire minority, withal not without influence upon Labour and political movements as the years passed. John Mitchel and Karl Marx taken neat, bouquets for politicians and the millennium for the multitude, every Sunday evening outdoors in summer, inside in winter, in Foster Place, near the Bank of Ireland, a small room in Abbey Street, nearby"<sup>2</sup> Pamphlet after pamphlet, manifesto after manifesto poured from Connolly's pen. Contributions to Miss Milligan's *An t-Sean Bhean Bhocht* (Belfast) or to Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* helped fill in the

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1, No. 1 is dated Aug. 13, 1898. At the beginning the paper was an 8-page penny weekly. In October, 1898, the form was changed. With the sub-title, "A Literary Champion of the Irish Democracy", the *Workers' Republic* became an 8-page magazine, on its blue cover was printed: "Advocates an Irish Republic, Abolition of Landlordism and Wage Slavery, Co-operative Organisation of Labour under Irish Representative Governing Bodies." Vol. 2, No. 1 is dated May, 1899; in form it was still a magazine, but without a cover. The price had been reduced to a halfpenny. Regular weekly publication was resumed with the second number, June 3, 1899. From August, 1899, to May, 1903, eighty-five numbers were published. Keir Hardie loaned £50 to facilitate its foundation.

<sup>2</sup> D. Ryan, *op cit*, p. 19. The Bank of Ireland had been the Parliament House before the Act of Union. Griffith's paper, the *United Irishman*, carried prepaid advertisements of these meetings.

time left by the *Workers' Republic*, in whose pages Connolly's future books appeared in serial form.

Throughout them all ran one persistent thread knit of two closely interwoven strands:

First, that in the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must, perforce, keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation, and that the shifting of economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working class element, and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class.

Second, that the result of the long drawn out struggle of Ireland has been, so far, that the old chieftainry has disappeared, or through its degenerate descendants has made terms with iniquity, and become part and parcel of the supporters of the established order, the middle class growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of the economic rivalry of England almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the political despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism as against every sentimental or historic attachment drawing them toward Irish patriotism; only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

For Connolly the appeal to history was irresistible; the pages of his paper were filled with reprints from the writings of bygone Nationalists. For the Wolfe Tone Centen-

<sup>1</sup> Foreword to *Labour in Irish History*. Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, pp xxxvii-xxxviii. Cf *Irish Worker*, Oct 31, 1914: "The Irish working class, as a class, can only hope to rise with Ireland. Equally true is it that Ireland cannot rise to freedom except upon the shoulders of a working class knowing its rights and daring to take them."

ary, Connolly republished, as '98 *Readings*, much of the fugitive literature of the United Irishmen. Mitchel and Lalor were liberally excerpted from. But far more did Connolly stress the contemporary living conditions of the workers. He jeered at those who demanded "security of tenure" for slum dwellers.<sup>1</sup> He characterised as inane the president of the Seventh Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, who urged that "Ireland sober is Ireland free" and denied the antagonism of interests between capital and labour.<sup>2</sup> He denounced McCarron for demanding for the workers a "fair share of the produce of their labour"—all should go to the labourer.<sup>3</sup> "Our trade union leaders are continually grumbling at the politicians—and as continually toadying to them"<sup>4</sup> On the Dublin "Labour Party" he heaped contempt; the contest for the Lord Mayoralty between a "labour leader" and a respectable alderman was "not capital vs. labour, but a sordid scramble for position between two sets of political wire-pullers, both equally contemptible".<sup>5</sup>

The Socialist Republican Party itself contested several municipal elections. On one occasion (1901) its candidate, who had been endorsed by the Dublin Trades Council, polled the second highest number of votes, being only 67 votes behind the victor. Connolly himself twice stood for election; his candidature was endorsed by the Trades Council, on which for a time he represented the United Labourers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Oct 15, 1898

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1900

<sup>3</sup> *Workers' Republic*, June 3, 1899

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, June 24, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 16, 1899

<sup>6</sup> In 1899 and 1900 its candidate was E. W. Stewart, manager of the *Workers' Republic*. In 1901 its candidate was W. McLoughlin, treasurer of the Tailors' Society, who was nominated on Stewart's motion.



Scant indeed were the concrete results of these seven years of agitation. After Connolly's emigration to America in 1903,<sup>1</sup> the Socialist Party wilted and all but died.<sup>2</sup> In Cork, too, Socialism waned.

In Belfast alone did Socialism in those early years of the twentieth century make any appreciable headway. There William Walker had, for a few months, conducted a *Labour Chronicle*. In 1905, the Belfast Socialist Party was carried into the Independent Labour Party, over the protests of the Irish Ireland element. On the Labour ticket Walker contested three Parliamentary elections, once coming within some 200 votes of election. It was from this quarter that came the insistent demand for affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee. Walker, alone among the presidents of the Irish Trades Union Congress from 1894 to 1907, declared, at Kilkenny (1904), for political action of the workers through a party of their own.<sup>3</sup>

The scene of these contests was North Dock Ward. In 1902 and 1903 Connolly himself contested Wood-quay Ward. Cf. files of *The Workers' Republic* and *The United Irishman*, see also W. P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement* and D. Ryan, *James Connolly*.

<sup>1</sup> In the United States Connolly became a lieutenant of Daniel De Leon. He never departed from his Irish nationalism and appealed mainly to the Irish workers in America, his organ was the *Harb.* For an account of his activities in America see D. Ryan, *James Connolly*, Chap. III.

<sup>2</sup> It struggled on, through many reorganisations, to emerge in 1921 as the Communist Party of Ireland, under the aegis of Roderic Connolly, son of its founder. The first transmutation was from "Irish Socialist Republican Party" into "Socialist Labour Party"; the latter's declaration of principles was, however, as definitely Republican as that of its predecessor. About 1908 the scattered fragments were again drawn together as "The Socialist Party of Ireland", with William O'Brien as Secretary; it was at the invitation of this Party that Connolly returned to Ireland in 1910. During the war this Party became increasingly moribund; in 1921 it was captured by young Connolly, who proceeded to expel such as remained of the old leaders. His Communist Party has itself since been exploded.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of Belfast socialism, *vide infra* Chap.

Despite the efforts of this handful of propagandists, the Irish labour movement was, in 1907, almost a generation behind the British labour movement. The "old unionism" still held sway; the political weapon was almost neglected. But in that year an English union sent to Ireland a troublesome organiser—much as in the United States Republican politicians shelved a troublesome member of the party by electing him to the Vice-Presidency in 1900. If "it is difficult to over-estimate the debt the English people owe to their powers of absorbing imports",<sup>1</sup> it would be even more difficult to overestimate the debt the Irish Labour Movement owes to its power of absorbing Irishmen returned to their native isle.

XII Many attempts have been made to effect a junction between the northern and southern socialist groups, but have invariably failed. One of the most interesting, just before the war, was marred by a doormat; some of the Dublin contingent had removed the regular doormat and substituted a Union Jack.

<sup>1</sup>A. F. Pollard, *History of England*, (in Home University Library Series), p. 51.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE "NEW UNIONISM"

Æ relates that one day, as he sat on the top of a Dublin tram, he felt a certain vibrancy in the air, as though he were in the presence of some vast magnetic power. He was irresistibly impelled to look up; his eyes fixed themselves on the masterful bulky figure of a man, seated at the other end of the tram. A few days later, he was introduced to that man; that man was Jim Larkin.

On June 21, 1907, the Belfast *Northern Whig* carried the headlines, "Dock Labourers' Wages in Belfast. . . . Strike would affect about 1,000 men"<sup>1</sup> It developed that the seamen and firemen also were demanding an increase. Offered half the amount they demanded, the men were advised by their leaders to insist on the concession of their full claims.<sup>2</sup> On the 25th, the offer was renewed; Larkin advised acceptance and the men agreed.<sup>3</sup> Such was the first mention of the newly-arrived organiser of the National Union of Dock Labourers, "the English strike organiser".

The dockers' demands were not conceded. Labourers

<sup>1</sup> This account of the Belfast disturbance is taken from the pages of the chief Orange newspaper, *i. e.*, from the most hostile possible source. In view of the well-merited reputation of the Irish press, accuracy in detail could not in any case be hoped for. It will be seen, however, that even these hostile sources confirm the essential fact that "Larkinism" meant a revolution in the ranks of Irish labour

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Whig*, June 22, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, June 26, 1907.

were brought in from other ports; the police turned out in force at the docks<sup>1</sup> On the 26th the strike began. Though there was no disorder, the military were called out. A number of railwaymen having gone out, replacements were "drafted" from employment elsewhere and put to work under military protection. A few carters struck in sympathy with the dockers.<sup>2</sup> The carters' strike spread rapidly. Men brought over from Glasgow to replace the strikers were jeered at and forced to return whence they came.<sup>3</sup> On the 29th the *Northern Whig* reported that the carters held the key to the situation, as their strike was highly successful. James Larkin, at the age of thirty-one, was bidding fair to win his first Irish strike.<sup>4</sup>

The incidents of the Belfast carters' strike may be briefly reviewed. The carters demanded 26s for a 60-hour week.<sup>5</sup> The Lord Mayor and Councillor Gageby attempted to arrange a conference; the employers refused. The Master Carters' Association gave notice of a general lock-out if the striking carters did not immediately return to work.<sup>6</sup> On July 4th all the carters of sixty firms ceased work; next morning the *Northern Whig* reported that practically no carting was done at all; peaceful picketing was proving very

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, June 26, 1907

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, June 27, 1907

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, June 28, 1907

<sup>4</sup> Even at this early stage of his career, efforts were made by Larkin's enemies to make capital out of his tempestuous personality. On July 3 the *Northern Whig* reported an announcement that Larkin was going to retire as leader of the strike as some employers refused to have any dealings with him and others had questioned his motives and his religious views; the truth was, said the *Northern Whig*, that he had promised to stand aside if his presence interfered with the negotiations.

<sup>5</sup> That is, a 5s. a week increase; the masters offered a 2s increase. *Northern Whig*, July 1, 1907

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1907.

successful<sup>1</sup> Amid threats of a general strike it was announced that 250 carters had gone back to work on the union terms, i. e., an increase of 5s. a week and 8d an hour overtime.<sup>2</sup> On July 10th appeared the first reports of rioting. Seizing the opportunity, the coal merchants issued a manifesto on the 11th. They announced that thenceforth they would have no dealings with the representatives of any union or combination; in the event of a strike against any member of their association, they would immediately lock out all their men. "To enable the men to carefully consider these conditions, work will not be resumed until Monday, the 15th inst. at 10 a. m., and then only if there shall have been previously shown a general unanimity amongst the men to accept our terms."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the coal men were to be idle over the week end of the 12th of July.<sup>4</sup> The sequel was miraculous. Catholic and Orangeman—"black papist" and "dirty prod"—joined in celebrating the anniversary of the victory of William "of glorious memory" and of the Pope who had blessed his banners. Irrespective of creed or party, the workers paraded through the streets of Belfast and listened to an address by Jim Larkin at the Custom House. When the coal yards opened on the Mon-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, July 5, 1907. According to the statement of the Master Carters' Association the twenty horses at work were being driven by the master carters themselves; over 1,000 horses were idle in the stables. On the 5th one firm reinstated the men dismissed for refusing to handle "tainted goods", 27 men resumed work on the understanding that the firms would not cart to or from boats and railways affected by the strike. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, July 8, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, July 12, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> The twelfth of July is normally the occasion for the restaging of the Battle of the Boyne. On this occasion there was nothing to report but "A Quiet Day"; *Ibid.*, July 13, 1907.

day morning no men applied for work<sup>1</sup> The performance was repeated on the following Monday.<sup>2</sup> Labour M.P.'s and representatives of the General Federation of Trades Unions flocked to Belfast to offer advice and assistance. £48,000 was put at the disposal of the strikers.<sup>3</sup> On July 26th the *Northern Whig* announced the settlement of the coal dispute on the basis of the recognition of the men's union and an 11s. increase. Eleven hundred dockers and carters were still out. Some 200 Belfast police constables held a meeting to discuss their own wages; the Cork police telegraphed their sympathy.<sup>4</sup> On the 28th the city was in turmoil over the demand of the police for the reinstatement of Constable Barrett, who had been suspended for refusing to ride with a blackleg carter<sup>5</sup> The government organised an expeditionary force; the Cameron Highlanders and Royal Berkshires arrived on the 30th as the first installment.<sup>6</sup> The disaffected police were transferred to other parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> On August 11 fierce rioting broke out; cavalry and bayonet charges were reported from Falls Road—surely a curious place to quell a dock strike<sup>8</sup> The next day the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, July 16, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, July 23, 1907

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, July 22, 1907 Hardly an issue of the paper during these weeks but chronicled the arrival of some eminent Britisher or the vote of a subsidy by some trade union. Branches of the Independent Labour Party also contributed, cf *Northern Whig*, July 23

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, July 26, 1907

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, July 29, 1907.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, July 31, 1907 More troops arrived next day, *ibid.*, August 1, 1907.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, August 5, 1907 Constable Barrett had been dismissed and other policemen suspended on Aug 1st, *ibid.*, Aug 2, 1907.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 12, 1907. On and near the Falls Road dwell the bulk of the Catholic workmen The district is remote from the docks. Most of the dockers live in the York Street area adjacent to the waterfront.

military fired on the mob in the course of five hours of desperate fighting — again on the Falls.<sup>1</sup> The *Northern Whig* reported, August 14, that handbills were posted up throughout the Falls district: "Not as Catholics or Protestants, as Nationalists or Unionists, but as Belfast men and workers stand together and don't be misled by the employers' game of dividing Catholic and Protestant". On August 15 the carters' strike was abruptly concluded. James Sexton, General Secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers, complaining that the strike was costing a thousand pounds per week, accepted the "honourable" but complete surrender negotiated for the men by the representative of the G.F.T.U.<sup>2</sup> Larkin, whose conduct of the strike in its early stages had produced such startling results, was ignored by his executive. As for the dockers, on September 4 "a deputation representing the men waited upon the Belfast Seamen's Company and expressed their sorrow for what had happened, their earnest desire to return to work on the old terms, and their intention if reinstated in their employment of working harmoniously with any fellow-employees. The company thereupon agreed to give employment to as many of them as they could find vacancies for and a number will be re-employed immediately."<sup>3</sup> The imported men were laid off two days later.<sup>4</sup>

The strike was over, but its lessons remained. Never had Ireland witnessed such a practical demonstration of the "solidarity of labour". The fact that it had been staged in Belfast—and in July at that—made the demonstration magnificently impressive. If unskilled labourers could stand

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 3, 1907, "Battle on the Falls".

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 16, 1907 "Honourable" is Sexton's adjective.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 5, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 7, 1907

shoulder to shoulder, for six weeks, yielding only when their cross-channel executive refused to continue strike pay any longer, what could not be achieved by well-organised, well-directed effort throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. The example of the coal men was particularly inspiring; that for two successive weeks not a man should apply for work at any coal yard in the whole city of Belfast—particularly as there was no immediate threat of reduction of wages—was a lesson not readily to be forgotten. At the same time, the action of the English executive in dictating absolute surrender was a solemn and pregnant warning to Irish trade unionists who put their whole trust in their British brethren.

From Belfast the new evangel was carried to Cork and back again to Dublin. Dockers, carters, and other general labourers eagerly accepted the principle of the sympathetic strike, the refusal to handle "tainted goods". The "Strike Organiser" was everywhere in demand, idolised by the hitherto hopeless denizens of the slums. A more effective campaign against tuberculosis than that of benevolent Lady Aberdeen had got under way. Instead of bringing over Scotchmen to teach the Irish "how to wash themselves", lecturing the workers on "How to Maintain a Family of Five on Twelve and Ninepence a Week", or distributing pamphlets to prove in detail how a family of seven could be maintained on from 8s. to 9s. a week by virtue of feasting on skim-milk, dripping, and treacle, a drive had been started to remedy the "lack of good wholesome food and sanitation, consequent on low wages, corrupt government, and disemployment".<sup>1</sup>

The Liverpool Executive of the N.U.D.L. had not bargained for such a crusade. When, in November, 1908, the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Dublin Trade and Labour Journal*, May 1909, p. 9.



Dublin carters recalled Larkin from Derry to lead their strike, his executive repudiated all responsibility<sup>1</sup> On December 7, 1908, Larkin was suspended by Sexton's executive<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding, the carters' strike was carried through to substantial victory. On the eve of Christmas Lord Aberdeen intervened; the men were reinstated, with assurance that their grievances would be fairly met.<sup>3</sup>

On January 4, 1909, the Irish Transport Workers' Union was founded<sup>4</sup> The "new unionism", under the name of "Larkinism" spread rapidly throughout Ireland. The revolution in trade unionism launched in London in 1889 was to be reenacted in Dublin in 1913. Meanwhile, its premonitory rumblings perturbed the calm of politicians and churchmen, of journalists and merchants. Not merely was the "Ascendancy" shocked at the fresh resurgence of the mere Irish—but that most uncompromising compromiser, Arthur Griffith, the editor of *Sinn Féin*, joined with the officials of English amalgamated unions in denouncing what he was pleased to call "English trade-unionism".

All the old arguments so eloquently pleaded by George Shipton,<sup>5</sup> so energetically refuted by Ben Tillett and Tom

<sup>1</sup> According to the statements of those close to Larkin, his appeal to the Liverpool executive was answered by a post card from Sexton: "Stew in your own juice" £20 is said to have been the total sum received from the executive, Larkin's family sold their furniture to pay the men.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. letter of Jan. 5, 1909 from James Sexton to Arthur Griffith, published in *Sinn Féin*, Jan. 23, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Sinn Féin*, Dec 26, 1908 During and after the Dublin carters' strike, Griffith penned a series of bitter attacks on Larkin, the "Strike Organiser"; the intervention of the Lord Lieutenant permanently soured the vehement Irish Cato

<sup>4</sup> Its material resources consisted of a table, a couple of chairs, two empty bottles, and a candle.

<sup>5</sup> Shipton, "Trade Unionism new and old", in *Murray's Magazine*, June, 1890 Cf also George Howell, *Trade Unionism New and Old*, 2nd ed. (London, 1894).

Mann,<sup>1</sup> were to be hurled at the heads of the Irish Transport Workers—with what added spice Ireland's subject condition could supply. The old unions were essentially "voluntary associations of workmen for mutual protection and assistance in securing generally the most favourable conditions of labour"; the new relied on intimidation and violence offered to non-union men, especially to "blacklegs". Provident benefits had constituted the chief glory of the old unions; without these benefits the new lacked cohesion and stability. The old unionism regarded strikes as evils to be avoided by conciliation and arbitration; the new openly disavowed conciliation and arbitration. The old unionism offered "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay", the new demanded less work for more pay. The old unionists realised that demonstrations of numbers produced unfortunate delusions of poor men when the balance on hand was insufficient, the new relied on mass demonstration, by bands of music, banners, Phrygian caps, and the like. The old believed in amalgamations, which had worked, the new favoured federations, which had failed. The old sought to remove the causes of discontent; the new deliberately stimulated discontent. The old trusted its leaders, tried and true; the new heaped scurrility on the old leaders and union officials. The old unionism was self-reliant, trusting in mutual help by associated effort; the new would turn from "effete" organisations to seek legislative help from the state. Such were to be the chief allegations brought against "Larkinism".

The reply was to be an adaptation of the comments of the Irishmen who had led the London dock strike. The voluntary principle in trade unionism was nonsense; selfish workers stayed out of the union but benefited by its efforts. Provident benefits had induced in the old unions a deadly

<sup>1</sup> The "new" trade unionism: a reply to Mr George Shipton by Tom Mann and Ben Tillett (London, 1890). Cf. also *Murray's Magazine*, July, 1890.

stupor; they were dying of inanition. The alleged repudiation of conciliation and arbitration was a falsehood; strikes were never begun till all other efforts at a settlement had failed. That they demanded less work and more pay was the highest eulogium on the new unionists; "the abolition of long hours, sweating, and all forms of overwork, or conditions of privation, is the mainspring of trades' union action—the very purpose of its being". The talk about demonstrations and the "balance on hand" was stuff; they were not led by "academic middle class" persons. The new unionism was based on the principle of amalgamation, not federation, genuine solidarity of the workers was the goal. The causes of discontent would never be removed by those who did not know them; they never favoured a new organisation till the old had proved incapable of responding to new needs. The talk of trusting the old leaders was bunkum; the old leaders were not interested in the unskilled labourer. The new unionists were out to cultivate a sturdy spirit of independence and to instill a deep sense of responsibility in the men; they were at pains to discredit appeals to the legislature or to Dublin Castle. In sum, "the fact is, the older section . . . has no real desire to see trade unionism become the all-powerful instrument for abolishing poverty; or if they do they have never yet succeeded in making it known". As their motto, might have stood that of their London brethren: "A nation—made free by love, a mighty brotherhood linked by a jealous interchange of good".

The employers, scandalised and not a little frightened at the successes of the men against their "masters", drew closer together, watching their opportunity to destroy the new union and its organiser. The first serious struggle came in "Rebel Cork". The *Cork Constitution*<sup>1</sup> reported

<sup>1</sup> Like the *Northern Whig*, the *Cork Constitution* is notoriously anti-labour. The same comment applies to the account of the Cork strike as to the account of the Belfast strike, *vide supra*.

on June 15, 1909, that 140 quay labourers, with carmen, loaders, and cattle men—employees of the Cork Steam Packet Company—had struck because three quay labourers belonged to Stevedore O'Rourke's "Workers' Union". This latter body was to become notorious in Ireland as a "scab" union. Two days later some goods porters on the Great Southern and Western railway were suspended for refusing to handle "tainted goods"; about 100 men struck in sympathy.<sup>1</sup> The next day it was announced that 130 men had been sent from Great Britain by the Shipping Federation to take the places of strikers. It was reported that 140 rail men were out; the carters had struck in sympathy. The *Cork Constitution* editorially proclaimed that it was time to put a stop to the epidemic of strikes.<sup>2</sup> Larkin's suggestion that the three men affected should "stand by", the union guaranteeing their pay, was rejected.<sup>3</sup> The employers refused to discuss matters with even so responsible an official as the High Sheriff of Cork.<sup>4</sup>

The masters felt that the time had come to make a determined stand, with firmly-closed ranks, to crush once for all the spirit of independence displayed by mere casual labourers. Extra police poured into the city.<sup>5</sup> On the 18th the Cork Employers' Federation adopted the following resolutions:

<sup>1</sup> *Cork Constitution*, June 17, 1909

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, June 18, 1909

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Labour Journal*, August 14, 1909

<sup>4</sup> *Cork Constitution*, June 18, 1909

<sup>5</sup> On the 19th, the *Cork Constitution* reported that there were over 500 police in Cork, the Welsh Fusiliers were to be "ready". Though "a prominent citizen told him [Mr Murphy, President of the Cork Trades Council] the smallest strike in Cork had never been carried out so peacefully as the present lock-out," the police were estimated to have cost the city £1000 a week.

That we, the employers of Cork, hereby bind ourselves and the firms we represent as follows:—

(1) To immediately dismiss any employee who shall wilfully disobey any lawful order out of sympathy with any strike or trade dispute.

(2) That the vacancy so caused shall be filled forthwith by local labour if procurable, failing this that the vacancy be filled from any available source

(3) That any such employee discharged shall not be employed by any members of the Federation.

That this meeting of merchants strongly condemns the action of Mr. P. Murphy, President of the Cork Trade Council in presiding in company with Messrs Horgan, Fearon, and Larkin, at a meeting held at Warren's Place, Cork, on Sunday last, where language was used by the speakers calculated to misguide the labourers of Cork, and lead them into foolishly believing that they could leave their work without notice, and resume at their pleasure.

The merchants also desire to place on record that the different carrying companies attacked have their entire sympathy and support in the steps they are taking to enable the business of the city to be satisfactorily carried on in future.

"It was announced that the Guarantee Fund already established, had been augmented by several large subscriptions—one of £5,000, another of £3,000, and several of £1,000 each, besides many smaller amounts."<sup>1</sup>

The men sought only restoration to work on the old terms, without victimisation.<sup>2</sup> Refusing the mediation of the Corporation, the Board of Guardians, and the other public bodies, the employers prolonged the lock-out for weeks without offering terms. They insisted that they were not parties to the dispute, which was merely a quarrel between

<sup>1</sup> *Cork Constitution*, June 19, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> "Every man was prepared to go back to his employment if he was allowed to go" *Cork Constitution*, July 3, 1909, report of strikers' meeting in City Hall.

the Transport Workers' Union and the Workers' Union.<sup>1</sup> On July 6 the Employers' Federation had unanimously adopted the following report:

Your committee having carefully considered the conditions which should be laid down by employers in re-employing any of their old hands or taking on new recommend that the following should be deemed essential points, viz.:—

(1) That in case of unskilled workers, employers shall be free to employ either the members of a union or non-unionists; and members of a union shall make no objection to working either with the members of another union, or with non-unionists.

(2) That unskilled workmen desiring employment must make application direct to their late employers for such employment as it may be now possible to give

(3) That all such workmen applying for re-employment, and who may be re-instated, shall undertake to obey all lawful orders under all conditions in future, and not to leave their employment again without giving legal notice

(4) That employers may adopt any conditions necessary for the conduct of particular business (including the use of machinery), and that the workmen shall agree to same.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the perfection of their organisation, to their financial resources, to the ruthless employment of the whole-sale lock-out, and to the labour of the men supplied by the Shipping Federation and by the Workers' Union, the employers were able to claim the victory. Despite the financial assistance of the trades councils of Cork, Dublin, and Belfast, and of other labour bodies, the men seeped back to

<sup>1</sup> "The disturbance has been solely created by differences between employees themselves only. One set of unskilled workmen trying to dominate and ruin another set of unskilled workmen." *Cork Constitution*, July 14, 1909: reply of Employers' Federation to the Corporation's suggestion of a conference. Cf Larkin. "It was said the dispute was one between two unions—that was a deliberate falsehood." *Cork Constitution*, July 3, 1909, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Cork Constitution*, July 7, 1909.

work on the terms dictated by the masters.<sup>1</sup> Yet the true victory remained with the workers. The Cork strikes and lock-outs gave the most practical possible object-lesson to the men of the necessity for the new Irish Transport Union. Its temporary set-back in Cork was more than offset by its gains elsewhere. The spirit of unrest could not be laid.

Even the Irish Trades Union Congress was compelled to take cognizance of the gospel of divine discontent. In 1908 Congress met again in Belfast; for the second time, it was presided over by a protagonist of the Independent Labour Party.<sup>2</sup> For the first time in its history, Congress listened to a presidential address endorsing "the alliance between the trade unions and the Socialists":

The Socialist has analysed the human misery connected with our industrial conditions, and has proposed a remedy. Until a better plan is suggested we may reasonably refuse to be drawn aside from the pursuit of a scheme which, while not perfect, is at least comprehensive, and appeals to all that is best in our hearts and minds. . . . I am not advocating anything in the nature of contentment among Irish trade unionists. We have no reasons to be contented. . . . No doctrine which backs up the present condition of society—where the drones revel in luxury and the bees perish for want—will stand the fire of the present day criticism.

At this Congress resolutions hitherto regarded as progressive were attacked as reactionary. A resolution on the hous-

<sup>1</sup> Cf e g, *Cork Constitution*, July 26, 1909. "The City of Cork Steam Packet Company are now getting as much labour as they require, and find no difficulty in securing hands for any vacancies that now exist, a number of which are being filled by the late employees, who have accepted the terms offered to them." The terms of the Employers' Federation included the giving of a bond of £5 not to quit their employment without notice, and to obey their employers' orders. *Cork Constitution*, July 28, 1909. For a resume of the dispute, cf. *Irish Labour Journal*, Aug. 14, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> John Murphy, Belfast Trades Council. For his speech see 15th Annual Report, pp. 23-27.

ing question, moved by McCarron—now a Councillor—was protested by Larkin and his little band. “Larkin said that when the workers did not get sufficient wages he did not see how they could advocate their buying out their own houses. . . . No man had any legal, moral, or divine right to own anything in the way of property or land. He was for the socialisation of land and dwellings.”<sup>1</sup> Again, in the discussion on the usual non-importation resolution, “Mr. James Larkin complained that the Irish Industrial Development Association had no regard to trade union conditions”; a Belfast supporter “said that the association was a capitalistic association. . . . He appealed to the Congress to disregard the association, and have regard only to fair conditions”<sup>2</sup> Though such protests were unavailing, Larkin was elected to the Parliamentary Committee

Congress did not accept the new departure without a severe struggle. The new Parliamentary Committee comprised five members of amalgamated unions, three old-line trade unionists belonging to Irish societies, and Jim Larkin.<sup>3</sup> In February, 1909, the Committee received a com-

<sup>1</sup> The resolution, calling “upon the Government to amend the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act so as to make title-deeds security for all monies advanced by Municipal or Urban Councils under this Act to tenants desirous of buying out the houses they occupy” was nevertheless carried by 42 votes to 9. 15th Annual Report, pp. 35-6

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39. P. T. Daly “said that they should allow small industries in Ireland to creep, while as to the larger industries, let them go into the association and insist on fair conditions”

<sup>3</sup> Michael Egan, J. P., T. C., Cork, United Kingdom Society of Coach-makers, Chairman

George Greig, Belfast, National Amalgamated Union of Labour, Vice-chairman

Mary Galway, Belfast, Textile Operatives

James McCarron, T. C., Derry, Amalgamated Society of Tailors.

Stephen Dinneen, Limerick, Irish Bakers' Union

John Murphy, Belfast Trades Council (Typographical Ass'n.)

James Larkin, Dublin, National Union of Dock Labourers

E. W. Stewart, Dublin, Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Treasurer

E. L. Richardson, J. P., Dublin Trades Council, Secretary.



plaint from the Belfast organiser of the newly-formed Irish Transport Union that the members of the National Union of Dock Labourers were blacklegging on members of the new union in Belfast "After considerable discussion, the matter was remitted to the Belfast Trades Council, and it was further decided, Mr. Larkin dissenting, that, pending a settlement of the dispute, no invitation to attend the Congress be sent to the Transport Workers' Union." In this decision they were fortified by the receipt of a most affable letter from James Sexton; the Secretary of the National Union was

instructed to point out to you that whilst the Irish Trades Union Congress may not be strictly bound by the decision of the Joint Board of the British Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party, and the Federation of Trades, that it is nevertheless contrary to the policy laid down by that body—viz., "that any so-called new trades-union started with the object of catering for any class of workers for which industry an organisation had before existed, shall not be recognised by any of the three national bodies mentioned".<sup>1</sup>

Larkin was expelled from the Parliamentary Committee.

At Limerick (1909) the Standing Orders Committee, by a narrow majority, recommended that the Transport Union's affiliation be accepted. Though adopting so much of the report as recommended the acceptance of an "invitation to a trip to Killaloe", Congress agreed to defer consideration of the main recommendation to the following morning; next morning the discussion was ruled out of order.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, Congress treated itself to a hotly contested debate, centering on the action of the Parliamentary Committee in expelling Larkin and refusing affiliation to the Transport

<sup>1</sup> Report of 16th Annual Congress, Limerick, 1909, pp 15-16, report of the Parliamentary Committee

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Union Through attacks on "English unions" and counter-attacks on "Sinn Feiners" and "Socialists", the stalwarts of the old trade unionism defended their conduct:

The decision of the Congress [said the chairman] might mean the wiping out of their Committee and trades unionism, but the members had a duty to discharge, and they would not shirk it. As to Mr. Larkin being expelled, it was the hardest duty they had to discharge. But as a matter of fact he was elected as a representative of the National Dockers, and he had ceased to be a member of that union. . . . They all realised that Mr. Larkin did good work for the dockers of Dublin, but did that justify his secession from the parent association? He said not. . . . No man should organise or carry out a strike without the permission of the Executive of his Union, otherwise, good-bye to good government in trades-unionism.<sup>1</sup>

"If the delegates voted against the Parliamentary Committee, then the Congress would cease to represent Trades Unionism in Ireland. They were at the parting of the ways, and they would wreck or capture it for another organisation."<sup>2</sup> By a vote of 49 to 39 Congress sustained the decision of the Parliamentary Committee. The utmost the supporters of "Larkinism" could secure was the appointment of a committee of seven "to inquire into the cause and development of the dispute in the National Union of Dock Labourers, and a subsequent secession of a large number of members, and the formation of the Irish Transport Workers' Union".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James McCarron, Derry, Amalgamated Tailors "The democracy of the two countries and of Scotland should not fight—they could not afford to fight. They were brothers no matter what be the colour of their skins—no matter at what altar they worshipped. The question of nationality should give way to the principles of trades unionism in that Congress." . . . "He appealed to the delegates to give an honest vote to do what was right, not to think of Saxon or Irishman, and not by their vote break up the Congress."

<sup>2</sup> John Murphy, Belfast, long an advocate of Socialism.

<sup>3</sup> 16th Annual Report, pp. 40-42.

The following year, at Dundalk, the controversy was resumed. The Special Committee reported

that no real justification existed for the secession of members from the National Union, if such secession is based on complaints as to illegal action or improper treatment on the part of the National Union; And that, as it is accepted on all sides that there is no objection to the formation and existence of an Irish Union, we are of opinion that the Irish Transport Workers' Union is a *bona fide* labour union, and entitled to recognition in the Trade Union Movement.

The consideration of the report being made first business, the dispute was interrupted only by an inspection of the establishment of Messrs. Macardle, Moore & Company, Brewers, and by the resentment of a Justice of the Peace at being referred to as "his worship from Cork". Despite the determined opposition of the delegates of the Dockers' Union and of the spurious Workers' Union, Congress accepted the affiliation of the Transport Union, though refusing to acknowledge that it was "entitled to recognition in the Trade Union Movement". Thus, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, already 3,000 strong, gained a foothold in the Irish Trades Union Congress, where it was to constitute itself the entering wedge for "industrial unionism" <sup>1</sup>

In July, 1910, Connolly returned from America as organ-

<sup>1</sup> 17th Annual Report, pp. 23-30 The advent of the new leader was emphasised by the withdrawal of an old one E. L. Richardson, long a dominant figure in the Dublin Trades Council, and Secretary to Congress since 1901 resigned in March, 1910, to accept a government appointment P. T. Daly, Larkin's chief supporter and long a foe of Richardson, was elected to the vacant office of Secretary. In consequence, McCarron, who had been associated with the Congress since its foundation and had twice presided over its proceedings, intimated his intention of "severing his connection with the Trades Congress". Others, less scrupulous, became loud lieutenants of Larkin

iser of the Socialist Party of Ireland, which for the past few years had been showing signs of returning vitality<sup>1</sup> A year later he was appointed Secretary and Ulster organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union<sup>2</sup> Under the able and energetic guidance of that remarkable team, Jim Larkin and James Connolly, the new evangel was spread in places where the masters had till then been most truly masters.

The goal of the new movement was Connolly's "Workers' Republic". It was succinctly defined as follows:

That under a Social Democratic form of society the administration of affairs will be in the hands of representatives of the various industries of the nation · that the workers in the shops and factories will organise themselves into unions, each union comprising all the workers at a given industry; that said union will democratically control the workshop life of its own industry, electing all foremen, etc., and regulating the routine of labour in that industry in subordination to the needs of society in general, to the needs of its allied trades, and to the department of industry to which it belongs; that representatives elected from these various departments of industry will meet and form the industrial administration or national government of the country<sup>3</sup>

"Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this co-operative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism—it is only State capitalism"<sup>4</sup>

To implement this programme,

<sup>1</sup> *Appeal for Organisation Fund* issued by the Socialist Party of Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> D. Ryan, *James Connolly*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Connolly, *The Axe to the Root* (Dublin, 1921), p. 18 Part I, Political Action of Labour.

<sup>4</sup> Connolly, *The New Evangel* (Dublin), p. 1.

the enrollment of the workers in unions patterned closely after the structure of modern industries, and following the organic lines of industrial development, is *par excellence* the swiftest, safest, and most peaceful form of constructive work the Socialist can engage in. It prepares within the framework of capitalistic society the working forms of the Socialist Republic, and thus, while increasing the resisting power of the worker against present encroachments of the capitalist class, it familiarises him with the idea that the union he is helping to build up is destined to supplant that class in the control of the industry in which he is employed. . . . On the day that the political and economic forces of Labour finally break with capitalistic society and proclaim the Workers' Republic, the shops and factories so manned by Industrial Unionists will be taken charge of by the workers there employed, and force and effectiveness thus given to that proclamation. Then and thus the new society will spring into existence, ready equipped to perform the useful functions of its predecessor.<sup>1</sup>

Though Connolly deemed it "absolutely indispensable for the efficient training of the working class along correct lines that action at the ballot box should accompany action in the workshop", yet he laid it down as axiomatic "that the fight for the conquest of the political state is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is the battle being fought out every day for the power to control industry."<sup>2</sup>

Despite Connolly's insistence on the vital importance of organisation, he gave a clear-cut warning that

the development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation; that, indeed, the most theoretically perfect organisation may, because of its very perfection and vastness, be of the greatest possible

<sup>1</sup> Connolly, *The Axe to the Root*, pp 20-21

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 28-29, Part II, The Future of Labour

danger to the revolutionary movement if it tends, or is used, to repress and curb the fighting spirit of comradeship in the rank and file <sup>1</sup>

True as it was that under the old craft unionism, trade unionists "were unconsciously being compelled by their false system of organisation to betray their struggling brothers",<sup>2</sup> yet the new industrial unionism might prove still more vicious if

into the new bottles of industrial organisation is . . . poured the old, cold wine of Craft Unionism . . . If . . . we allow officialism of the old, narrow sectional kind to infuse their spirit into the new organisations, and to strangle these with rules suited only to a somnolent working class, then the Greater Unionism will but serve to load us with great fetters. It will but be to real Industrial Unionism what the Servile State would be to our ideal Co-operative Commonwealth <sup>3</sup>

Huge unions, powerful amalgamations are worse than the "much-contemned small unions of the past", if "side by side with that enlargement and affiliation of organisations, there has proceeded a freezing up of the fraternal spirit"

Let me emphasize the point that the greatest weapon against capital was proven in those days to be the sporadic strike. It was its very sporadic nature, its swiftness and unexpectedness that won. It was ambush, the surprise attack of our industrial army, before which the well trained battalions of the capitalist crumpled up in panic, against which no precautions were available <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37, Part III, Old Wine in New Bottles.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41, Part III

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38. "I have no doubt but that Robert Williams, of the National Transport Workers' Federation, is fully convinced that his

To these tactics the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union had from the first been committed, "keeping in mind that its mission is not to make slavery tolerable but to overthrow it, and to replace it by a free and independent Workers' Republic".<sup>1</sup>

1911 was a year of "industrial unrest" throughout the United Kingdom; the "sympathetic strike" was in high favour on both sides of St. George's Channel. July of that year saw the port of Dublin crippled by the great strike of the seamen and firemen, supported by the dockers and carters. "In consequence of the action of the union not only are the crews prevented from earning wages, but the quay labourers, whose employment depends on the running of the ships, are enduring similar hardships as the crews"<sup>2</sup> To prove their sympathy for the men who were being made to suffer by "the union with which some of you are connected",<sup>3</sup> the Coal Merchants' Association locked out their carters, thus preventing 800 additional men from earning wages.<sup>4</sup> At the end of July, through the intervention of the Castle, Dublin shipmasters were induced to concede their seamen and firemen the terms already accepted in Great

articles and speeches against such strikes are and were wise; I have just a little doubt that they were the best service performed for the capitalist by any Labour leader of late years. The big strike, the vast massed battalions of Labour against the massed battalions of capital on a field every inch of which has been explored and mapped out beforehand, is seldom successful, for very obvious reasons. The sudden strike and the sudden threat to strike suddenly has won more for Labour than all the great Labour conflicts in history." *Ibid.*, p. 40

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, Introduction (1921).

<sup>2</sup> "Statement of Dublin Shipping Companies", *Freeman's Journal*, July 20, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> "Notice posted up by a firm of coal merchants", *Freeman's Journal*, July 25, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, July 17, 1911

Britain;<sup>1</sup> carters and dockers resumed work, and peace reigned again in Dublin.<sup>2</sup>

A week later, the morning papers carried startling headlines. "London Dock Strike 16,000 men affected"; "Railway Workers' Claim. 1,500 men out on strike"<sup>3</sup> The news grew rapidly more alarming. In Liverpool 4,000 railmen were out;<sup>4</sup> the railway services were dislocated, amid scenes of disorder. In London 30,000 men were out.<sup>5</sup> Next day the number had leaped to 80,000; the military had been called out. Though the London dock strike was reported ended on August 14th, the rail troubles were spreading; a general strike was regarded as probable. Next day came the news from Liverpool that 30,000 dockers were locked-out. Still Dublin remained calm, the *Freeman's Journal* was convinced that the rumoured extension of the trouble to Ireland had little, if any, foundation.<sup>6</sup> On the 18th, however, it was announced that the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants had called a strike in Ireland for six o'clock that morning. Next day 2,000 men were reported out in Dublin; the situation was reported serious throughout the country. Two days later, the *Freeman's Journal* reported the settlement of the railway strike, on the basis of immediate resumption of work, prompt reinstatement, and the reference of all grievances to a Conciliation Board.<sup>7</sup> Despite the outbreak of a strike at Jacob's biscuit factory, Dublin breathed easily once more.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 1, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 7, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 9, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 10, 1911.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 15, 1911. In Cork, however, trade was crippled by the suspension of Liverpool sailing. *Ibid.*, Aug 16, 1911.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 21, 1911. Despite the settlement, rioting was reported in Dublin on this and the following day.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 23. This strike was estimated to affect two or three



On September 6th the timber merchants issued a statement to the press. Owing to the dislocation of the rail services, they had locked out their five hundred employees on August 21st; though the masters offered to pay the men for the day lost, the men had refused to return unless conceded a 2s increase. The masters were anxious that the public should know that the timber-trade dispute was not a lock-out.<sup>1</sup> On the 15th, four hundred goods men on the Great Southern and Western executed a lightning strike.<sup>2</sup>

The conditions under which they are prepared to return to work are, that they are not to be requested to handle any traffic which may be offered to the company, at any of their stations in Dublin, for conveyance to any station on your railway, or for exchange on to any other railway by firms in the city and district who are at present in dispute with their employees, and that no man who came out on strike shall be punished in any way whatever, but all men shall be allowed to resume their ordinary duties.<sup>3</sup>

The dispute spread, train services were reported dislocated.<sup>4</sup>

thousand of the biscuit maker's 4,000 employees; the demand was for an increase in wages of one or two shillings a week, the prompt concession of a 2s increase to the men and a 1s. increase to women and minors, though without recognition of the Union, was promptly accepted. *ibid*, Aug 28, 1911. The wages of Jacob's girls were stated as 7s to 15s a week.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Sept 6, 1911. "There are other matters which are better left unmentioned for the moment."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Sept. 16, 1911. The company had refused to decline shipments of timber.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from O'Meara, a checker, to the General Manager of the G S & W, dated Sept 15, 1911, published by the *Freeman's Journal*, Sept 18, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Sept 19, 1911. The Dublin and Southeastern Railway was not affected, "the company having decided to ask the timber merchants not to press them to receive goods for transmission" (*ibid*, Sept 18). The timber merchants brought suit against the company for its refusal to receive consignment (*ibid*, Sept 21). Within a week the D. & S. E. had reversed its policy (*ibid*, Sept 27), the strike had been reported failing the day before (*ibid*, Sept 26).

The executive of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, though offering negotiations for an amicable settlement, threatened a general strike. Troops were poured into the city; reservists were offered 15s. to 18s. a week as goods porters<sup>1</sup> As the companies refused to deal with the union,<sup>2</sup> the National Executive called a general rail strike—but on Irish railways only.<sup>3</sup> The Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen refused to join in the strike, but many of its members quit work in sympathy with their fellows Though the *Freeman's Journal* reported that public opinion was in favour of the strikers,<sup>4</sup> though priests<sup>5</sup> and politicians<sup>6</sup> poured out appeals to the railway directors,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1911 36 workmen had been imported from Great Britain; 29 of them deserted on their arrival in Dublin, 26 returning to England.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 21, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 22, 1911 The D. & S E was exempted, *ibid.*, Sept 23. Cf the bitter comment of *Sinn Féin*, "Irish Strikes and English Reciprocity", Sept. 23, 1911, *vide infra*, chapter IX

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> Though some priests counselled an immediate return to work, the Catholic clergy were, as one of them pointed out, instinctively for the poor and labour; the Catholic clergy, he wrote, had got nothing from the Martins, the Gouldings, and the Murphys (*ibid.*, Oct 2, 1911) Another "Catholic priest" attacked Sweetman as a "rosy-faced and comfortable 'bourgeois'", and acclaimed Parnell, Davitt and Dillon as revolutionists, he professed himself scandalised at the condition of the poor and the inhumanity of the employers, despite the "trumpet-tongue of Leo XIII" (*ibid.*, Oct 3) A meeting of the Bishops, presided over by the late Cardinal Logue, at Maynooth on Oct 10 acknowledged that "the bitter ordeal . has excited sorrow and pity in the breast of everyone who has a heart to feel for our people". "As the Pastors of the whole flock, bound to seek justice and mercy for all, but laden with a special load of care for the toiling masses, who are often the least able to defend their rights", the Hierarchy advised the "Irish working man" to eschew "the guidance of mischief-makers" (*ibid.*, Oct 11). See also lecture by Dr M'Caffrey, of Maynooth, on "Capital and Labour" (*ibid.*, Oct 24).

<sup>6</sup> This applies only to the Nationalist politicians; Griffith was persistently hostile The A. O H., guided by John Dillon Nugent, refused to interest itself; see Nugent's letter to Larkin, *Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 6, 1911.

though the men offered to abandon the doctrine of tainted goods, the companies refused to concede even reinstatement without victimisation or penalisation<sup>1</sup> Instead, they fell back on the usual policy of starvation, closing down their Inchicore works, thus throwing another 1,300 men out of employment.<sup>2</sup> Finally, on the threat of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to "withdraw all labour",<sup>3</sup> the directors yielded so far as to "undertake to take back at once all the locomotive and permanent way men and 90 per cent of the traffic men"<sup>4</sup> The offer was accompanied by a demand for the withdrawal of the men's original manifesto, "an expression of regret for leaving work without notice", and an undertaking for the future to obey unquestioningly "all the commands of the officers".<sup>5</sup> This offer was accepted, the English executive contenting itself with verbal condemnations of the Labour Party for associating with "this damnable blacklegging government"<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterward, the timber dispute was ended by absolute surren-

<sup>1</sup> Goulding offered only to consider individual applications for reinstatement. As was pointed out on behalf of the men, a similar offer had been made after the Cork strike in 1909, only four or five of the 121 strikers had been taken back, *ibid*, Sept 29, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1911

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. S. R. S. resolution calling on the Transport Union to give effect to its promise, *ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1911

<sup>5</sup> It was understood that this offer was coupled with a verbal assurance that the remaining ten per cent would be taken back as vacancies occurred This was repudiated by Goulding in a letter to the Press, *ibid*, Oct. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Cf report of A. S. R. S. Conference at Carlisle, *Freeman's Journal*, Oct 5, 1911. Robert Williams, who had been sent to Dublin to take charge of the strike reported that "The situation in Ireland could not be understood by an Englishman." The A. S. L. E. F. officially gave as its reasons for not supporting the strike the terms of settlement of Aug 19 and its own disbelief in the principle of the sympathetic strike, *ibid*, Oct. 6.

der on the part of the men.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the new weapons could not succeed if "soldiering on the job" was to be permitted to important sections of the industrial army.

Meanwhile, however, the Transport Union was waging in Wexford its first significant struggle. At the end of August, 1911, two firms of ironmasters closed their works, locking out their 550 employees. The men had preferred no demands, had made no trouble—but they had joined the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.<sup>2</sup> P. T. Daly, local organiser, raised no objection to the transference of the men to any other *bona fide* union, but insisted on their right to join the Transport Union if they chose to do so.<sup>3</sup> Refusing to hear of any intervention—by the County Council, by the clergy, or from any other source<sup>4</sup>—, the masters stood firm, filling the town with police.<sup>5</sup> For almost six months the struggle wore on, master after master closed down his plant. The mayor of Wexford locked out his men for joining the Transport Union;<sup>6</sup> a week later he was glad to negotiate their return through the union's official, the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 7, 1911

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1911

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 2, 1911, *cf* also Sept 28

<sup>4</sup> "The men will deal with their employers" *Ibid.*, Aug 31, 1911.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 8, 1911. Before the arrival of the police 700 men had paraded the town in perfectly orderly fashion, the mayor confessed he felt "futile", *ibid.*, Sept 6. Next day 8 foremen who returned to work were mobbed, but the excitement was quieted by the intervention of a trade-union leader, *ibid.*, Sept 7. The arrival of 250 extra police was the signal for further disorder, *ibid.*, Sept 8. On the 9th the *Freeman's Journal* reported that Wexford was quiet and gave the credit to P. T. Daly, Transport Union organiser. The effort of the police to "preserve order" had, as usual, resulted in nothing but a casualty list; one of the men the police had batoned died five days later, leaving a widow and eight children, *ibid.*, Sept 13. Daly was evicted from the coroner's inquest for criticising that official's mode of procedure, *ibid.*, Oct 4

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 2.

men retaining their union membership<sup>1</sup> Attempts to reopen the iron works with imported men uniformly failed; an exceptional labourer accepted reinstatement on the masters' terms<sup>2</sup> At the end of January, 1912, Daly was arrested and deported to Waterford; the police again tried the effect of baton charges<sup>3</sup> A resolution was introduced at a meeting of the Board of Guardians,

That we condemn the Executive Government for allowing the Transport Union delegates to be at liberty, as their only object appears to be the ruin of the trade and industry of Wexford which means starvation for the workingmen and their families.

The resolution was lost for want of a seconder<sup>4</sup> Connolly, taking Daly's place, speedily effected a settlement on the lines of the original offer of the Transport Union The masters were to recognise an Irish Foundry Workers' Union, and immediately to reinstate their men through that union, without victimisation. A counter-suggestion from the masters for a union composed only of men actually employed in the Wexford foundries and wholly distinct from the Transport Union was rejected by the men<sup>5</sup> The Irish Foundrymen's Union remained in affiliation with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union; two years later it had become absorbed as a branch of that Union<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 9, and letter from Daly, *ibid.*, Oct. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 29, 1912

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 30. "J. O'Connor said that in the Land League days the workers of Wexford had stood by the farmers, and their treatment of that resolution that day was only what the Wexford men deserved from the farmers."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 7. The employers refused negotiations through any body except the men, accompanied by the clergy, or the clergy alone. The final terms of settlement were negotiated between Cruise O'Brien, editor of the *Wexford Free Press*, and Connolly.

<sup>6</sup> *Cf.* Congress Reports, 1912-14, Membership.

The "new trades unionism" continued, from its headquarters at Liberty Hall, Beresford Place, Dublin, to spread its revolutionary teachings throughout the four provinces. The crisis came in 1913. The Dublin masters might well have said, in the ever-applicable verbiage of David Lloyd-George, "the chariots of retribution are drawing nigh". The *Irish Times*, commenting editorially on the Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry into the Housing of the Dublin Working Classes, said:

We knew that Dublin has a far larger percentage of single-room tenements than any other city in the Kingdom. We did not know that nearly twenty-eight thousand of our fellow-citizens live in dwellings which even the Corporation admits to be unfit for human habitation. We had suspected the difficulty of decent living in the slums; this report proves the impossibility of it. Nearly a third of our population so lives that from dawn to dark and from dark to dawn it is without cleanliness, privacy or self-respect. The sanitary conditions are revolting, even the ordinary standards of savage morality can hardly be maintained. To condemn a young child to an up-bringing in the Dublin slums is to condemn it to physical degradation and to an appalling precocity in vice. These four level-headed civil servants have drawn a picture hardly less lurid than the scenes of "Dante's Inferno", and they give chapter and verse for every statement. It is a bitter reproach to Dublin that their report should go forth to the world, but it is a necessary and well-deserved reproach.

. . . The Corporation's policy has at once increased and demoralised the miserable army of slum workers. "Larkinism," in so far as it is a revolt against intolerable conditions of life, is one of the by-products of our civic administration.<sup>1</sup>

Far from bringing pressure to bear on the Corporation—much less remedying their own sweating wages and bad

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Times*, Feb. 8, 1914.

conditions — the Dublin masters girded themselves for a death-grapple with "Larkinism".<sup>1</sup> As early as 1911, imitating the example of their class in Cork, they had formed the "Dublin Employers' Federation, Limited", "to afford mutual protection to and indemnity of all employers and to promote freedom of contract between employers and employees".<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1913, their leading spirit, Mr. William Martin Murphy, precipitated the struggle with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.<sup>3</sup> Four hundred four employers united in the effort to compel their employees to sign the following form:

<sup>1</sup> The *Irish Independent*, owned by the chairman of the Dublin Employers' Federation, made haste to repudiate the employers' responsibility for slumdom, without attempting to explain how economic rents could be reconciled with the current rates of wages, this newspaper commented editorially "In passing it may be pointed out that this report, frank and searching though it be in its criticism of the evils that exist, does not bear out in a solitary particular the charges made against the Dublin employers of being responsible for the slums of the city. The strictures which are passed upon the administration of the sanitary laws cannot fall upon the employers as a class, though they certainly do imply censure on the general body of the citizens for failing to return the right class of men to the Municipal Council . . . In the past the provision of sanitary dwellings by private enterprises has been handicapped by competition with insanitary dwellings which could be let at rents which would not pay for the provision of decent houses." (*Irish Independent*, Feb. 18, 1914)

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Worker*, July 29, 1911: "Employers' Secret Society Unmasked". Arnold Wright, who characterises the *Irish Worker* as "an extraordinary farrago of disloyalty, scurrility, and mendacity with an underlying note of intimidation", has given an independent account of the formation of the employers' "businesslike scheme" in *Disturbed Dublin* (London, 1914), pp. 86-7

<sup>3</sup> For accounts of the strike, varying in colouring, see Wright, *op. cit.*; Report of 22nd Annual Irish Congress (Dublin, 1914); Reports of British Congresses of 1913 and 1915; Annual Report for 1918 of the I. T. & G. W. U.; Report of Dublin Disturbances Commission, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1914, XVIII, [Cd. 7269], [Cd. 7272.]; and W. P. Ryan, *The Labour Revolt and Larkinism* (London, 1913).

I HEREBY UNDERTAKE to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers, and, further, I agree to immediately resign my membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (if a member); and I further undertake that I will not join or in any way support this Union.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty thousand workers were thrown out of employment, the majority not members of the Transport Union. The desperate struggle was maintained for six months.

We had thirty-seven unions engaged in the struggle, each acting on its own line of defence and attack and according to its own methods. Those who were engaged had shown magnificent courage—women and men, aye, and little children—had proven their heroism. Hunger, the gaol, and death itself did not deter them. . . . We found that no political party, no church, made a protest against the abuse of the laws by the capitalist class.<sup>2</sup>

Financial assistance to the men affected was forthcoming from all sections of the labour movement. While the Dublin Trades Council played the leading role, all sorts of unions throughout the country rose manfully to the occasion; the inconspicuous body of Limerick Pork Butchers "sent more every week in proportion to their strength than any other union".<sup>3</sup> English trade unionists contributed food, money, and oral moral support, though refusing seriously to consider "direct action" in aid of the Dublin men. The history of the Dublin war of 1913-14 deserves a special study in itself; it can only be indicated here. The character of the struggle can best be conveyed in the language in which that most tolerant of kindly men—George Russell, leading proponent of the peaceful and orderly evolution of Ireland on cooperative lines,—addressed the Dublin employers:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wright, *op cit*, App. I, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> Larkin's presidential address at Dublin Congress, 1914; cf. 22nd Annual Report, p. 34

<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Committee Report, *ibid*, p. 24.



You were within the rights society allows you when you locked out your men and insisted on the fixing of some principle to adjust your future relations with labour when the policy of labour made it impossible for some of you to carry on your enterprises. Labour desired the fixing of some such principle as much as you did. But, having once decided on such a step, knowing how many thousands of men, women and children, nearly one-third of the population of this city, would be affected, you should not have let one day have passed without unremitting endeavours to find a solution of the problem.

What did you do? The representatives of labour unions in Great Britain met you, and you made of them a preposterous, an impossible demand, and because they would not accede to it you closed the Conference: you refused to meet them further: you assumed that no other guarantees than those you asked were possible, and you determined deliberately, in cold anger, to starve out one-third of the population of this city, to break the manhood of the men by the sight of the suffering of their wives and the hunger of their children. We read in the Dark Ages of the rack and thumbscrew. But these iniquities were hidden and concealed from the knowledge of men in dungeons and torture-chambers. Even in the Dark Ages humanity could not endure the sight of such suffering, and it learnt of such misuse of power by slow degrees, through rumour, and when it was certain it razed its Bastilles to their foundations. It remained for the twentieth century and for the capital city of Ireland to see an oligarchy of four hundred masters deciding openly upon starving one hundred thousand people, and refusing to consider any solution except that fixed by their pride. You, masters, asked men to do that which masters of labour in any other city in these islands had not dared to do. You insolently demanded of those men who were members of a trade union that they should resign from that union; and from those who were not members you insisted on a vow that they would never join it.

Your insolence and ignorance of the rights conceded to workers universally in the modern world were incredible, and as

great as your inhumanity. If you had between you collectively a portion of human soul as large as a threepenny bit, you would have sat night and day with the representatives of labour, trying this or that solution of the trouble, mindful of the women and children, who at least were innocent of wrong against you. But no! You reminded labour you could always have your three square meals a day while it went hungry. You went into conference again with the representatives of the State, because, dull as you are, you know public opinion would not stand your holding out. You chose as your spokesman the bitterest tongue that ever wagged in this island,<sup>1</sup> and then, when an award was made by men who have an experience in industrial matters, a thousand times transcending yours, who have settled disputes in industries so great that the sum of your petty enterprises would not equal them, you withdraw again, and will not agree to accept their solution, and fall back again on your devilish policy of starvation. . . .

You may succeed in your policy and ensure your own damnation by your victory. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Æ's threatening prophecy came true. The Dublin Employers' Federation, Limited, clung grimly to its policy. At the end of January, 1914, "the fight was called off by the Union, and the members returned gradually to work on such terms as they could make". To all superficial appearances, "Larkinism" had been scotched. "When Jim Larkin left for America in November, 1914, Connolly stepped into the 'bearnna baoghail' as Acting General Secretary. But the reaction from the great Lock-out was still strong and victimisation and unemployment were rampant. The great War had begun and the European shambles claimed thousands of our reservist members. With a shrunken membership, an empty treasury, and a load of £3,000 debts, the prospects before the Union were anything but bright."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Healy, now Representative of the Crown in the Irish Free State

<sup>2</sup> "An Open Letter to the Employers By 'Æ'," in *The Dublin Strike* (Dublin), pp. 4-7.

<sup>3</sup> I. T. & G. W. U., Annual Report for 1918, p. 5.

Yet in the deepest sense, "Larkinism" had triumphed. The Dublin struggle had fired the hearts and minds of the working classes throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. "The development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation"<sup>1</sup> The fighting spirit had been aroused, not of the working classes alone, but of idealistic men and women of all ranks, creeds, and professions. The Republican wing of Sinn Fein turned its attention to the needs of Labour. Most significant of all, the most helpless of all classes in Ireland had learned the lesson of its power, and in the learning had proved itself worthy of Ireland's bravest traditions. To quote from the speech of Mr. Russell to an enthusiastic London audience:

I have often despaired over Dublin, which John Mitchel called a city of genteel dastards and bellowing slaves, but a man has arisen who has lifted the curtain which veiled from us the real manhood in the city of Dublin. Nearly all the manhood is found among obscure myriads who are paid from five to twenty-five shillings per week. The men who will sacrifice anything for a principle get rarer and rarer above that limit of wealth. I am a literary man, a lover of ideas, but I have found few people in my life who would sacrifice anything for a principle. Yet in Dublin, when the masters issued that humiliating document, asking men—on penalty of dismissal—to swear never to join a trades union, thousands of men who had no connection with the Irish Transport Workers—many among them personally hostile to that organisation—refused to obey. They would not sign away their freedom, their right to choose their own heroes and their own ideas. Most of these men had no strike funds to fall back on. They had wives and children depending on them. Quietly and grimly they took through hunger the path to the Heavenly City. They stand silently

<sup>1</sup> Connolly, *Old Wine in New Bottles in The Axe to the Root*, p. 37.

about the streets. God alone knows what is passing in the heart of these men. Nobody in the Press in Dublin has said a word about it. Nobody has praised them, no one has put a crown upon their brows. Yet these men are the true heroes of Ireland to-day, they are the descendants of Oscar, Cuchulain, the heroes of our ancient stories. For all their tattered garments, I recognise in these obscure men a majesty of spirit. It is in these workers in the towns and in the men in the cabins in the country that the hope of Ireland lies. The poor have always helped each other, and it is they who listen eagerly to the preachers of a social order based on brotherhood and co-operation.<sup>1</sup>

Even the Irish Trades Union Congress surrendered at discretion. It had been weakening for some years. In 1911, Congress had unanimously adopted a vaguely worded resolution in favour of the amalgamation by industries of all existing unions, "with one central executive elected by the combined unions, with power to act unitedly whenever there is a strike or lock-out in any industry, thus making the grievance of one the concern of all".<sup>2</sup> In 1912, yielding to the force of Connolly's reasoning, Congress had endorsed the principle of a pledge-bound Irish Labour Party.<sup>3</sup> In 1914, meeting in Dublin under the presidency of Jim Larkin, Congress endorsed the stand of the Transport Union in the preceding year and urged its executive "to take steps to try and bring about the amalgamation of Trade Unions connected with each industry".<sup>4</sup> Accepting at last the imperative necessity of independent political action by Labour, Congress so amended its constitution as to constitute itself a Labour Party as well as a Trade Union Congress.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Æ's Albert Hall address, Nov. 1, 1913, in *The Dublin Strike*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 19th Annual Congress, Galway, 1911, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 20th Annual Congress, Clonmel, 1912, pp. 12-19.

<sup>4</sup> Report of 22nd Annual Congress, Dublin, 1914, pp. 85-7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24, 43-59 and 91-2.

For the first time the "Parliament of Labour" put itself on record as aiming at the wholesale reconstruction of society.

The Congress urges that Labour unrest can only be ended by the abolition of the capitalist system of wealth-production with its inherent injustice and poverty, and among first steps to that end demands legislation to secure to every person a national **minimum** of civilised life by measures providing for a legal **minimum** wage in agricultural and all industries, the reduction of the hours of labour to a maximum of 48 hours per week, complete provision against sickness, the guarantee of a national minimum of child nurture, the prevention of unemployment, the building of healthy homes for all, and the abolition of the Poor Law.<sup>1</sup>

The revolution in the Irish Labour Movement was accomplished. No longer were the usual ameliorative measures demanded by trade unions to be regarded as the whole goal of organised labour. Palliatives were still to be demanded, but such demands were to be merely incidental to the high aim of overthrowing autocracy in industry to make way for the Cooperative Commonwealth, the Workers' Republic.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

## CHAPTER IX

### TWENTIETH-CENTURY NATIONALISM

"DURING the early days of the split Mr. Parnell did indeed adopt a programme laid before him by Dublin workmen—a programme embodying nearly every measure advocated as palliative measures by the Socialist parties, but with his untimely death disappeared every hope of seeing that programme adhered to by any Home Rule party."<sup>1</sup> From September, 1890, to May, 1891, Michael Davitt had conducted the *Labour World*; state socialism was his solution for Labour's problems. In 1899, Connolly characterised William Field, Michael Davitt, and T. W. Russell as bait held out by the Parnellites, Dillonites, and Unionists, respectively, for the working-class voters to nibble at.<sup>2</sup> Irish Labour could no longer afford to put its trust in the charming of the middle-class politicians; "strong in its own power it [the working class of Ireland] marches irresistibly forward to its destiny, the Socialist Republic".<sup>3</sup>

Such views were confined to tiny propagandist bodies; organised labour lacked the self-confidence and the self-consciousness to adopt them. Though local labour parties and individual trade unions or trades councils put forward candidates in profusion after the extension to Ireland of the Local Government Act in 1898, the Irish Trades Congress professed itself neutral in politics. The very fact that most

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Oct 8, 1898

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Sept 2, 1899

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Oct 8, 1898

of the energies of Congress were devoted to the passage of labour legislation compelled that body, however, to take stock of the political situation. At Cork, 1902, the Congress instructed the new Parliamentary Committee "to take all necessary steps to formulate a scheme for the creation of a pledge-bound labour party, controlled by and answerable to, the Irish Trades Union Congress".<sup>1</sup> Ignoring the instruction, the Committee presented to the Newry Congress (1903) a report lauding the work of the Irish Parliamentary Party, while criticising Ireland's Unionist Members for their failure even to acknowledge the receipt of Congress' resolutions. This Congress heartily recommended to the trade unions of Ireland "an immediate affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee to promote the formation of independent labour representation in Ireland".<sup>2</sup>

Though Congress was thoroughly persuaded of the necessity for the representation of Irish Labour at Westminster, serious disagreement existed as to the best means of attaining that much-desired end. North and South agreed that the Unionist Party was an unsatisfactory medium. But while many Southerners were perfectly satisfied with the Nationalist Party as the mouthpiece of organised labour, many Northern delegates preferred the non-sectarian, "international", British Labour Party. The idea of an independent Irish Labour Party found scant favour till the rise of "Larkinism".

From 1903 to 1911 Congress persisted in heartily recommending to Irish trade unionists affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee (after 1908 with the Labour Party) despite the unwavering opposition of the minority. The arguments of the opposition were summed up in 1906

<sup>1</sup> Report of Ninth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Tenth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress.

by J. P. Nannetti, M P., Lord Mayor of Dublin,<sup>1</sup> who made a special trip to Athlone for the purpose of advising the Trades Congress :

With reference to the organisation of a separate Labour Party a good deal could be said on both sides, but he thought they in Ireland were in the happy position that they had a Labour Party already in England. The Irish Parliamentary Party were the Labour Party, and he asked them to take advantage of that Party. Where was the necessity of setting up new parties. The platform on which he was proud to stand was broad enough for any workingman. They could make the Parliamentary Party do everything they wished. They required no spur in that direction, he assured them. They were purely labour as well as Nationalist, and he as a worker could not be with them on the platform that day were it not that he was a Nationalist as well (hear, hear). He could not be a Member of Parliament were he a purely labour candidate, and he challenged contradiction when he said that not a single constituency in Ireland would return a man on the labour question purely <sup>2</sup>

The majority, while agreeing on the need for the direct representation of Irish labour in Parliament, differed widely in their reasoning. A Belfast delegate "had no fault to find with the Irish Parliamentary Party, but as such they did not represent entirely the views of the voters of Ireland. There were Unionists in Ireland as well as Nationalists, and he contended they should have a distinct Labour Party." <sup>3</sup> A Dublin delegate "yielded to no one as an Irish National-

<sup>1</sup> Mr Nannetti was regarded by the trade-union leaders as one of their best friends, his candidature was even endorsed by them. In Connolly's opinion he was a "skunk" *Workers' Republic*, Nov 10, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Thirteenth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress. Apart from the question of Home Rule, the Labour Party's attitude on sectarian education was repellent to many Irishmen.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, J. Murphy, Typographical Association, Belfast branch



ist; but he believed in the principle that Labour should go first and Nationality afterwards. Until they had independent Labour representation in Ireland they would never get their grievances remedied”<sup>1</sup>

Through all these controversies the Parliamentary Committee continued to use the Labour and Nationalist Parties indiscriminately as vehicles for the expression of its wishes at Westminster. “Your Committee note with the keenest admiration the splendid work performed by the Labour Party. . . . And your Committee thank them for what they have already done, and what we hope they will be able to do for the workers of Ireland and Great Britain.” “Your Committee have also to acknowledge with thanks the attention given by members of the Irish Party to the representations and recommendations frequently made to them on your behalf during the past year.”<sup>2</sup>

Gradually the sentiment of organised labour swung more definitely against the Nationalist Party. The Belfast Congress of 1908 adopted a resolution standing in the name of the Kilkenny Trades Council,

That as the activities of our Parliamentary representatives have for many years past been almost entirely devoted to the interests of the tenant farmers and landlords, this Congress declares that a systematic trade union propaganda campaign should be undertaken, for the purpose of organising the forces and directing attention to the demands of the artisans and labourers of Ireland, . . .<sup>3</sup>

The Home Rulers put forward their best efforts to avert the threatened defection of Labour. In 1911, Devlin, mak-

<sup>1</sup> Report of Eleventh Annual Irish Trades Union Congress: G. Leahy, Dublin Trades Council.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Fourteenth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, pp 13-14: report of Parliamentary Committee

<sup>3</sup> Report of Fifteenth Annual Trades Union Congress, pp. 53-4.

ing a public appeal against victimisation of the strikers, commended the railmen for their "spirit of manliness and of loyalty to their class which does them infinite credit".<sup>1</sup> The "Dublin Six" wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, condemning the railway companies for their refusal to reinstate the men, who were ready to concede the directors' demands for the abandonment of the doctrine of tainted goods. Kettle, in particular, protested against "shooting prisoners of war" and referred to the directors as "amateur Alvas, who, as controllers of transportation in Ireland, have touched no Irish industry save to its hurt".<sup>2</sup> Redmond presided at a meeting of the Party leaders where a resolution was adopted opining that the directors were in duty bound to reinstate the men.<sup>3</sup> On October 22nd, 1911, a fortnight after the end of the Irish rail strike, Devlin, who had in the meantime written again to the *Freeman's Journal* to attack the "policy of vengeance and starvation",<sup>4</sup> addressed a convention of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, at Limerick:

The rights of labour and the dignity of labour can no longer be ignored. . . . Whatever rights labour enjoys in Ireland, it owes them to the Irish Party. . . . At this time the refusal of employers to recognise the workers' organisations is absurd. So far from being antagonistic to the unions, the employers ought to welcome them (cheers). . . . You may crush out a strike of the workers in blood, if you will, but whilst injustice remains you will never have peace. . . . The rights of capital are not supreme over the rights of the workers to a living wage and fair conditions of employment, and, on the other hand, the presumption on the part of the labourers that capital is their

<sup>1</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Sept 29, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Sept 30, 1911

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 2, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Oct 2, 1911.

common enemy and exists only for their exploitation, is absurd, and can only lead them into courses fatal to their own best interests (cheers) <sup>1</sup>

The Irish Trades Union Congress declined to be impressed. The possibility of a Home Rule Parliament in the near future was too powerful an argument in favour of the formation of an Irish Labour Party. Despite an eloquent entreaty "that they should put their case before the Irish Party, who represented all sections in Ireland, and should not go behind their backs to any English Party",<sup>2</sup> the majority of the delegates had ceased to feel any confidence in the promises of the "Nationalist" leaders. In 1912, Congress, already strongly under the influence of the Left Wingers, instructed its incoming Parliamentary Committee to draft a constitution for an independent Labour Party in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

Labour's distrust of "the miserable creatures who misrepresent them in Parliament" was amply justified during the Dublin strike of 1913 when

they scurried back like rats to their hole. These cacklers about self-government had no word to say on the politics of their own city, but after ten weeks of silence they came out with six lines of a letter signed by all the six poltroons. They disclaimed all responsibility for what is happening in the city and county they represent. It was no concern of theirs; but they would agree to anything the Archbishop might say!<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the strength of the Nationalist Party was

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Oct 23, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Twentieth Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, p. 36: McCarron.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp 38-41, 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Æ (G. W. Russell), Albert Hall Address, Nov. 1, 1913. Cf. *The Dublin Strike*, pp. 2-3.

being sapped in another direction. On March 4th, 1899, had appeared the first number of a halfpenny "National Weekly Review". The *United Irishman*, as the new journal was styled, announced a much-mixed, but refreshing policy. Disclaiming hostility to "any section of the Irish political body, whether its flag be green or orange, which holds that tortuous paths are the safest for Irishmen to tread", Arthur Griffith made public announcement of his private resolve to be bold. Commending the Financial Reformers, the Gaelic League, and the Amnesty Association, he demanded more. "We accept the Nationalism of '98, '48, and '67 as the true Nationalism and Grattan's cry, 'Live Ireland—Perish the Empire!' as the watchword of patriotism" <sup>1</sup>

The *United Irishman* was bold. Joining hands with Maud Gonne, Major McBride, Frederick Ryan, and James Connolly, the editor threw himself vigorously against the rule of "Semiramis" <sup>2</sup> in general and against the Boer War in particular.

The Queen of the famines, of the pestilences, of the emigrant ships, of the levelled homesteads, of the dungeons, and the gallows has had her gentle heart touched! The Russian and the Frenchman are cleaning up their guns, and she fears for the danger of poor Ireland. She will drive through Dublin to show the wicked people of St. Petersburg and Paris how we love her and her country, and to stimulate our love she will place our city under martial law, and her soldiers will point their bayonets at our breasts while she passes through <sup>3</sup>

From the first issue, the *United Irishman* fathered the cause of Labour, never sparing the rod, however.

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 4, 1899

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 16, 1899

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 31, 1900.

The first elections under the extended franchise in the towns have resulted very satisfactorily for labour, and the result goes to prove what the people can do when their sympathies are aroused and they are properly organised . . . For the first time in our history the reins of representative local government has fallen within the grasp of the toilers. . . . The men returned to represent the working people should carefully avoid allying themselves with any of the existing political factions, and should endeavour to carry out the work for which they were chiefly elected. They should only interfere when the great underlying principle of Nationality is at stake.<sup>1</sup>

It was not long, however, before Griffith's enthusiasm for contemporary trade unionism in Dublin had cooled. In 1901, he referred to "the so-called Labour Party, which having made itself the tool of the Pile clique and the whiskey ring in turn in the Council Chamber, has earned for itself the contempt and laughter of men who looked to it once with hope as the party of Nationalism, progress, and corruption-killing in the Corporation",<sup>2</sup> and to the "Dublin Trades Council, which hasn't time to bother about the County Council rejecting a contract from an Irish firm to do the work on its premises for £1 less than the Manchester firm has done it", though it "is exciting itself about Ireland receiving no army contracts".<sup>3</sup> When in January, 1903, the secretary of the Irish Trades Union Congress<sup>4</sup> was a candidate in the Inns' Quay Ward, the *United Irishman* remarked that "for ability and commonsense he is the best candidate in the field; yet while Mr. Richardson represented

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 4, 1899

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept 7, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1901.

<sup>4</sup> E. L. Richardson, Secretary of the Congress from 1901 to 1910, when he resigned (Mar. 5) "on appointment as Manager of the Board of Trade Labour Exchange at Dublin". Report of 17th Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, p. 43.

the Ward in the Council for two years, . . . he never bothered his head about the slums surrounding that great institution, the Dublin Trades Hall, Capel-street.”<sup>1</sup>

The United Irish League, . . . so far as it exists in Dublin, is an agency of the worst description for demoralisation. The so-called Labour Party is equally as demoralising, and equally as great an imposture. We observed the Labour Party on Christmas Day going to Mass at the Pro-Cathedral in state. It wore an unctuous smile, a London tall silk hat and kid gloves, a Leeds suit and Nottingham boots, and leaned on the arm of the Publican. Meanwhile the poor of Dublin fester and die in rotten houses, work grows scarcer, and the people groan under the imposition of rates, the highest, perhaps in the Three Kingdoms—rates increased twenty per cent to pay for the jobbery and corruption of Cork Hill. If the voters of Dublin make up their minds to purify the city, the work can be done. The publican, the slum-owner, the loyal-address shoneen, the bogus labour man, are in the Corporation, and control it only because they have been voted there by the voters whom little knots of knaves in every ward drive like sheep to the polls.<sup>2</sup>

Griffith poured out his scorn on the Dublin Labour Party for tacking itself on to the tail of the whiskey ring and later attempting to denounce the men in whose election it had assisted, as sham Nationalists and enemies of the working man.

The Dublin working man cannot be fooled all the time. He is the most unselfish of Irish Nationalists, and the most easily duped. But shoneenism and traitorism, disguised in the garb of piety or in the garb of “labour”, cannot always hoodwink him. The interests of the Dublin workingman are bound up inseparably with the Nationalist cause, and his ideals have always been the National ideals.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 17, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 3, 1903.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1903.

For labour candidates who were also Nationalists—even though they might be Socialists—the *United Irishman* entertained feelings of the warmest friendship.

The able and honest men who are going forward as candidates could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Foremost amongst them is Mr. James Connolly, the Irish Socialist Labour Party's candidate in the Wood-quay Ward. He is opposed by the shoneens, the tenement-house rack-renters of the poor, the publicans, and we regret to say, the priests. We are not Socialists, but we would be intensely gratified to see a man of Mr. Connolly's character returned to the Dublin Corporation, to let the light in on the corruption that sits enthroned on Cork Hill, and we trust every Nationalist voter in the Ward will register his vote for the man who is fighting against the Free Drink and Fever Party.<sup>1</sup>

The pages of Griffith's paper were open to correspondents of radical views. A "Son of an Irish landlord" wrote to advocate an Irish Republic: "The interests of the masses are identical all the world over. The masses of the world will have to unite. . . . Religion of the present day is only another name for Capitalism."<sup>2</sup> Frederick Ryan was the ablest and most energetic exponent, through the pages of this nationalist organ, of the views of thoughtful advocates of the rights of Labour. One of his contributions, "CAPITALISM AND NATIONALISM—A Socialist View", may be reproduced here in full, as it brings out most clearly and pointedly certain all too obscure aspects of the nationalist movement:

In all countries there are but two distinct classes: the master-class owns and controls all the means of production, and distribution, the land, the railways, the mills, factories, newspapers, banks, and so forth, and they employ the slave-class at a pittance

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 10, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1899

to create wealth, giving them in return a fraction of their produce—as small a fraction indeed as circumstances permit; and the slaves may starve (and do starve, as the time of the ‘Great Famine’) if they cannot obtain from one of the master-class permission to labour, that is to say, unless one of the master-class can see a chance of exploiting them. That a slave occasionally pushes his way up to the master-class and one of the master-class occasionally, as a result of improvidence or what-not, sinks into the slave-class no more vitiates the fact of sharp division than the occasional transfer of an alleged Nationalist to the British faction vitiates the fact of the sharp distinction between that faction and the Irish nation. A foreign war is a very effective means of blinding the slaves to this fact: they rejoice at farm-labourers and factory-hands cheering for his “country’s” victories, while troops are being sent to Bethseda to operate against Lord Penrhyn’s miners.

In Ireland we are too prone to think we are superior to that sort of thing; we think that *we* have no master class leading *us* on any wild goose chase that *we* have no slave class, and that *we* could not be led into the absurdities which impose on the English labourer. Yet we watch our master class grow highly indignant at the wrongs committed by England’s master class; *e. g.*, Wm. Murphy, running his tramwaymen 12 or 13 hours a day, with one day off in 10, gaily tells us that he is a patriot—that he subscribes to the National Fund and even the Gaelic League. “Don’t I cherish the National traditions and rank my country only next to a good electric contract?”

“Advanced” people are trumpeting out panaceas of the latest “economic” science—viz. “industrial development”. The woes of the capitalist match-maker or soap-boiler are painted for our sympathy. Mr. So-and-So has a match-factory in Dublin, say, where he employs from seventy to a hundred girls at wages from 5s. to 12s. per week, the said girls helping to throng Grafton St. and Westmoreland-street at night, in company with Mr. Somebody-else’s paper-bag girls. Now comes the great panacea. If Mr. So-and-So could only double his turn over, he could actually employ, not 70 or 100, but per-



chance 200 girls—at 5s. to 12s. per week; and we could actually have *double* the number of promenaders in Grafton-street and Westmoreland-street, thus also helping to elevate us, and it would be good for trade generally. There would doubtless be a “boom” in slum property and police barracks.

This is ideal Nationality, this which shouts in one breath against the music hall and the gutter Press, and in the next clamours for the very conditions to be multiplied which have bred the music hall and the gutter Press in every manufacturing country under the sun. In short, merely to multiply the number of the slaves without touching the slave-system is what this “economic” reform aims at. On the other hand the ideal of those who really wish to free Ireland is to fight Capitalism in its every disguise and under every aspect, whether Irish, English, or French, and in working for the socialisation of the means of production in Ireland and joining hands with the workers of other countries who are moving towards a like end we shall attain all that the best political Nationalism aims at, and more than is dreamt of in the political Nationalist’s philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

That the columns of the *United Irishman* were open to the expression of such views by no means betokens any acceptance of those views by the editor. On the contrary, the *United Irishman* ran also a series of articles on “Industrial Possibilities”, pleading for sacrifices in the interest of an Irish Industrial Revival. To a correspondent who objected to the establishment of any factory unless it offered the operatives a “decent livelihood and fair chance of self-improvement”, the author of this series replied: “Any factory which finds employment for the people here affords them an opportunity for self-improvement, the most essential opportunity, too, as it keeps them here.” Irish workers mustn’t stickle about low wages until Irish industries could afford to pay higher ones. “She cannot hope to compete

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 29, 1900.

in every respect with her great manufacturing rivals at the start; her employers must be satisfied with smaller profits; and her mechanics and general workers must also make a sacrifice in money for the moral and social gain of living amongst their kindred in their own land.”<sup>1</sup>

Griffith himself, absorbed in advocating the “Hungarian policy” and in gathering evidence of the unnational spirit of individual capitalists, of public bodies, and of labour organisations,<sup>2</sup> had little time to spare for social problems. He realised keenly the sufferings of Dublin slum-dwellers, and resented any peculiarly gross handling of the subject of poverty by smug and comfortable persons. Referring to an editorial appreciation of a letter written by Cardinal Logue, Griffith commented:

It is apparently the belief of the leader-writer of the Freeman’s Journal, although not of his Eminence, that the people of Ireland are so innately bad that if they were paid as high wages for their labour as these Lancashire workers, and thus enabled to live in comparative comfort, they would cast aside both morality and religion. It is therefore essential, according to the Freeman’s leader-writer, that the Irishman and the Irishwoman must be kept poor in order that their souls may be saved. There are, of course, some exceptions. The leader-writer on the Freeman, for instance, can enjoy a salary and a degree of material comfort which would be sufficient to damn a whole village in Conne-mara, and still be saved, and the shareholders of the Freeman itself can pocket their annual eleven per cent, without any fear of a fiery hereafter. But if James Malone, a friend of ours who

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, July 5, 1902

<sup>2</sup> “Not only has the Corporation of Waterford by a majority pledged itself to an address, but the federated trades of Mr John Redmond’s constituency have also expressed their approval of addresses of welcome to the English King. . . The federated trades of Waterford want ship-building, and hypocrites and fools that they are, they think an address to the King will establish shipbuilding.” *United Irishman*, June 13, 1903

ves in a tenement house in the Coombe, and supports a wife and seven children on fifteen shillings a week, which he earns by working twelve hours a day in a brewery, was driven by reading Sir Horace Plunkett's book—which, indeed, he never will read—or by our evil advice and assistance to obtain thirty shillings a week for eight hours' work per day, and in consequence attained a degree of material comfort, is it infallibly certain that James Malone's soul would be damned? <sup>1</sup>

But to any comprehensive policy in remedy of the evil, Griffith refused to commit himself, insisting on a concentration of all forces in the struggle for national independence, guided by burning hatred of the English.

Socialism in the abstract is seldom considered in Ireland dispassionately. There are few people in Ireland who do not subscribe to St. Paul's dictum and Fintan Lalor's theory of the ownership of the soil, but there are fewer still who call themselves Socialists, since it has been assumed that Socialism is synonymous with atheism—a gross error for which the less-educated advocates of Socialism are themselves largely responsible. The time for Ireland to decide whether her national development shall proceed on the lines of Collectivism or on the lines of Individualism, will be when Ireland has regained her political independence, and as the teachings of English Socialism tend to make Irishmen regard the political independence of their country as a matter of minor importance, we agree with P. J. 'Shea's condemnation of Irishmen touching it. English Socialism exerts a denationalising tendency on the Irishmen who accept it, and the difference between the English Socialism and the English Jingo is not too broad. During the Boer War, the most truculent of the Jingo host was the English Socialist, Hatchford, and but a week ago English Socialists were howling it against Russia to the tune of "Rule Britannia". The most necessary lesson for the Irish people to thoroughly learn is, that

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 12, 1904.

whether the English call themselves Liberals or Tories, Imperialists or Socialists—they are always the English.<sup>1</sup>

Toward the end of 1905 a "National Council" was established; the new movement became "a duly constituted political party with its own policy and aims";<sup>2</sup> the *United Irishman*, bankrupted by a libel suit, was replaced by *Sinn Féin*.<sup>3</sup>

Week by week henceforward we shall devote the first page of *Sinn Féin* to the summary and chronicle of the work done by the National Council, the Gaelic League, Cumann na nGaedheal, the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Industrial Development Association, and all other bodies, whatever the field of their labour, the object of which is the re-creation of an Irish Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

Anxious to break every bond between the two islands, *Sinn Féin* addressed itself to "The Irish Workingman" on the subject of amalgamated unions.

Our sympathy is with the Irish artisan. He has faults, but he does perform an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. It is puerile to lay the blame for Irish industrial backwardness on the idleness or dishonesty of Irish artisans, for the Irish artisan is as honest and industrious as the average artisan of most countries. He is certainly not much alive to his own interests, and his economic education—that is, his grasp of his position in relation to the community as a whole—is limited. It is only a few days since a majority of men, claiming to represent him, declared for a federation of Irish trades-unions with the trades-unions of England—that is, declared for the government of the Irish artisan from England, the exportation of the Irish Workingman's money to London, the subservience of the Irish Work-

<sup>1</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 19, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, *The Evolution of Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1920), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> The first number appeared May 5, 1906.

<sup>4</sup> *Sinn Féin*, May 5, 1906

ingman's interests to the interests of England. We do not believe the men who voted for this extraordinary proposal either understood what they were doing or represented the Irish artisan. But, whilst he permits such men to speak in his name, he must be prepared to have occasional estimates of his character, such as that which has now stung him, given to the world. The Irish artisan will live to an old age before he will witness the artisans of Germany transferring the centre of their trades-union government from Berlin to London, or the artisans of England transferring the centre of their trades-union government from London to Berlin. But such an act of folly would not be as egregious as the transference of the centre of government of Irish trades-unionism from Dublin to London.<sup>1</sup>

The argument was put on a more definitely material plane in an article by Miceal O Flannagain on Sinn Féin and Irish Trades Unionism.

Unquestionably the aim of our movement is to build up a nation from within, and in the task our principal hope lies in the Irish artisan, but if he continues to have his councils swayed by the dictates of an Executive having London, Liverpool, or Manchester for its headquarters, the possibility of establishing even a healthy industrial atmosphere in Ireland is indeed remote. Ireland at the present time seems to be a sort of happy hunting ground for English trade union organisers, who come over and preach of the glories of amalgamation and its consequent benefits. But the English workman looks at the question merely from the standpoint of £. s. d.; for a time he may lose a little on the transaction, but eventually makes sure to recoup himself. In fact he treats the question as a commercial transaction and acts accordingly. To my own knowledge, Irish trade unionists have been brought out on strike solely with the idea of diverting industry into English channels; certainly the men so brought out may have received an amount per week as strike pay, but it is seldom if ever they get more than their particular trade union

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, June 30, 1906.

may have contributed to the common fund. In the end, the English Executive informs the trade union that it was better to resume, and with what result? The employer grows distrustful, may employ him for a time, and soon dispenses with his services altogether, but his place is filled by either an Englishman or a Scotchman, on whom the employer imagines he can rely, apparently unconscious of the fact that the new arrival may be a member of the same trade union which compelled his Irish workman to cease work. Strikes in Ireland engineered in England, have done more to supplant native artisans than any cause I know of.

Looking at the question from a financial standpoint, I find that a large amount is handed over yearly to trade union executives in England. Were this money kept at home and utilised in the formation of co-operative societies attached to Irish trades unions with the view of establishing and supporting native industries I venture to remark that the Irish labour market would not be overcrowded with dispirited but at the same time capable and intelligent artisans.<sup>1</sup>

A contributor wrote from Manchester to warn his compatriots that hope of advantage from the connection with British labour was a delusion and a snare.

As an Irishman whose misfortune it is to be a "British worker" I would warn Irishmen generally against English "labour" politics, just as much as against Liberal or Tory. The average Labour M.P. is a more insufferable prig than ever the average "Irish" M.P. God save Ireland from British Trades Unionism, with its spurious democracy, and its mushroom growths to "respectability", growths which either totally ignore their humble associates of former days, or are forever boasting of their former humbleness, to which, by the way, they never intend to return, should they be compelled to barter honour and principle to prevent such a catastrophe.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Mar 30, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Aug 15, 1908.

Being something of a pragmatist, Arthur Griffith had accepted trade unionism as Irish. But the trade unionism that he knew in Ireland was the "old trade unionism". A labour movement that might interfere with the infinitely-to-be-desiderated Irish Industrial Revival he was by no means prepared to stomach. Though denouncing "the English economics" of *laissez-faire*, Griffith accepted the *fait accompli* of capitalism, which his glorified heroes, Davis and Mitchel, had denounced as "the English system". In this characteristically compromising attitude, the editor of *Sinn Féin* was characteristically uncompromising. In his eyes the "new trade unionism" which for Æ meant "the despairing effort of humanity to raise itself out of a dismal swamp of disease and poverty",<sup>1</sup> could be nothing but "English Trade Unionism in Ireland".<sup>2</sup>

The outbreak of the Dublin carters' strike in 1908 provoked a violent outbreak from *Sinn Féin*.

Recently a strike-organiser from England arrived in this country in connection with a disastrous strike in Belfast, attempted, but failed, to engineer one in Derry, secured one later on, apparently, in Cork, and last week led a strike in Dublin. . . . At the behest of an English labour union a number of Irishmen were brought out on strike, with the possible effect of paralysing half the trades of the city, and inflicting compulsory idleness on thousands of the artisans of Dublin whose interests the Trades Council was instituted to guard

. . . The Council exists to prevent strikes—to prevent industrial war, and its inaction in the face of the fact that a foreign body, without consultation or warning to it, plunged Dublin into turmoil is almost inexplicable.

. . . It must not again be possible for any foreign labour union to call a strike in Dublin, or in any part of Ireland. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Albert Hall Address Cf *The Dublin Strike*, p 2

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin's* usual heading for articles on Larkinite strikes

The sooner the men who were brought out on strike last week by an English organiser erect themselves into an Irish labour union, as the Corporation workmen have done, and affiliate themselves directly with the Trades Council, the better. English trades unionism has no interest in this country except England's interest, and the events of last week have fully opened the eyes of a good many Irish trades unionists to its sinister aspect.<sup>1</sup>

The dispute between Irish workingmen and Irish employers was not to be discussed on its merits; England must not be allowed to participate in the washing of Ireland's dirty linen. "The question at issue is not the carters' grievances—which we have no doubt exist—it is whether at the bidding of outsiders Irish workmen shall declare battle on Irish employers. If it be admitted that English trades unionism has the right to direct industrial conditions in this country, then Ireland as a commercial country is placed definitely under the control of England."<sup>2</sup> "The National Council is engaged at the present moment in perfecting a scheme of Industrial Arbitration Courts under which disputes between employers and employed will be settled without strikes and without intervention from England. Under this scheme, strike organising will become an unprofitable occupation, and England can keep her strike organisers at home to try and persuade the English workingman not to play the blackleg on the workingmen of other countries."<sup>3</sup>

Griffith's violent antipathy to "the paid servant"<sup>4</sup> of an

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Nov. 28, 1908 "English Trade Unionism in Ireland"

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1908, "The Dublin Strike".

<sup>3</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Dec. 12, 1908, "The Dublin Strike" Cf *ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1908: "To every country in the world where strike-breakers are needed, England supplies them all—the statement is that of a speaker at the last English Trades Congress, and English Trades Unionism helps in the work—as it helped in the Belfast strike when its trade union railway servants came over to replace the Irish strikers"

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1908.



English union was not to be appeased by the founding of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

The English Union of Dock Labourers having repudiated the Strike Organiser, that person is now seeking an opening for himself as organiser of an Irish Transport Workers Union to be run in opposition to the Society in whose name he has hitherto carried out his strikes. We wish well and will give all our assistance to any genuine Irish organisation of transport workers, but to assure the public that it is genuine the first essential of such a body is that those connected with it are not suspended or dismissed officials of the English Union which they formerly lauded as the one and only union to which Irishmen should belong.

Griffith was even inclined to sympathise with the Liverpool executive; it was "a monstrous state of affairs" that Irishmen should enter on a strike "without the sanction of the Executive of the Union to which the men were affiliated",<sup>1</sup> though such action was the obvious corollary of Sinn Féin's own axiom that Irishmen should not strike at the behest of an English executive. Accordingly, Sinn Féin gave the fullest publicity to the efforts of P. J. MacIntyre, an organiser of the bogus Workers' Union, to discredit Larkin and to counteract his growing popularity among the workers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1909, "Dublin Strike".

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Mar. 27, 1909, *sq.* The Cork organiser of this union was publicly censured (June 17, 1909) by the Cork Trades Council for arranging with the Cork Steam Packet Co. to have members of his union replace the striking members of the Transport Union. The Workers' Union was expelled from the Dublin Trades Council on July 5, 1909. Cf. *Irish Labour Journal*, vol. i, no. 4, July 10, 1909. At Galway (1911) the Irish Trades Union Congress unanimously adopted the report of the Parliamentary Committee, refusing affiliation to the Workers' Union. Cf. Report of 18th Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, pp. 20-22 and 26-28. Griffith himself had taken occasion to challenge "the English president of the Workers' Union... to deny... that the person only less exalted in the Union than himself was an English publican". *Sinn Féin*, Aug. 15, 1908.

The great advocate of the King, Lords, and Commons of '82, while bitterly denouncing the Cork strikers in 1909, was filled with commiseration for their sufferings.

Of all methods of settling differences between employers and employed, the strike is the crudest. To resort to it before every other means has been exhausted is to alienate public opinion—to resort to it without resources for a lengthened struggle is a madness akin to the action of a general who would lead his soldiers to a campaign without weapons or commissariat. The history of strikes in Ireland is a history of defeat for strikers, and loss to the community. If the Trades Councils in Belfast, Dublin, and Cork had done their duty we believe the disastrous strikes that have taken place recently in these three cities would have been averted, the trade that has left these ports have been retained, and the men have been granted all that was fair in their demand<sup>1</sup>

His bitterness was increased when he turned his eyes across the Channel.

During the period covered by these strikes in Ireland peace reigned in the great English and Scotch ports. There was no dislocation of business there—no loss of trade there. The flag of "labour" was not unfurled against the flag of "capitalism" in the British ports in sympathy with the Irish strikers. On the contrary, shipping with cargoes handled by men who replaced the strikers in Ireland was discharged without question on the other side by "union labour".<sup>2</sup>

To paraphrase Martin Luther, "It is the devil's dear wish to bring about a social rebellion in order to hinder and disgrace the political revolt."<sup>3</sup> As Martin Luther ob-

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, July 3, 1909. "The Cork Strike."

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin*, July 24, 1909. \* "The Strike in Cork"

<sup>3</sup> *Werke* (Weimar), VIII, p. 683, cited by J. S. Schapiro, *Social Reform and the Reformation* (New York, 1909), p. 87.

jected to the peasants' attempt "to interpret Christian freedom in an entirely material sense",<sup>1</sup> so did *Sinn Féin* resent Connolly's interpretation of Irish nationalism. Under the heading "A Socialist 'Key' to Irish History, by Seumas O Congaile", *Sinn Féin* sneered at *Labour in Irish History* as a "Tract for the Times". "There is no denying that the tract is an interesting publication; equally avowed be our opinion that it is irritating, not by virtue of its argument, but of its method, of its lack of perspective, of its dogmatism and of its rhetoric"<sup>2</sup>

"Whatever causes the area of manufacturing to contract in Ireland dangerously affects the future as well as the present prosperity of the country."<sup>3</sup> Such was the constant refrain of *Sinn Féin's* charming song. The Wexford lock-out, coming on the heels of the English rail strike (in which 16,000 Irish workers had struck in sympathy with 200,000 Britons), summoned forth all the tremendous denunciatory power of which *Sinn Féin* was capable. Forgetting its recently expressed maxim, "Better a broken head than a broken spirit",<sup>4</sup> Mr. Griffith hurled his invective at the heads of those who permitted themselves to be driven from their employment rather than abandon the trade union of their choice. "If . . . they desire to merge themselves in a union of unskilled labourers directed from Dublin, and subservient to a majority unconnected with their trade, we think the employers have legitimate grounds for objection."<sup>5</sup>

There are hundreds in this country and in others to urge on a fight between employers and employed, and there are thous-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII, p. 326, cited by Schapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Dec. 3, 1910

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1911 "Strikes and Lock-outs in Ireland"

<sup>4</sup> *Sinn Féin*, July 24, 1909 "The Strike in Cork."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1911. "Strikes and Lock-outs in Ireland."

ands too timid, no matter where the merits lie, to speak to the men with any voice but the voice of commendation for all their actions, lest they be denounced as capitalists and supporters of capitalist tyranny. It is not without appreciation of the humour that is to be found in the most tragic disputes in Ireland that we hear voices from Wexford, imported and native, denouncing the one journal in Dublin that capital has never been able to influence nor power to silence, as the supporter of capital against labour. As we have spoken to the capitalist we shall speak to the workman in Ireland, and tell him that his duty to his class can never transcend his duty to his country—that the interests of Ireland are above the special interest of any of its classes, as they are above the special interest of any of its sects, and of any of its parties. The name of Irishman shall never be secondary to the name of aristocrat or democrat, capitalist or labourer, Catholic or Protestant, Unionist or Home Ruler, whilst we live with a hand to write or a tongue to speak. This country shall never be divided into hostile camps of employer and employe as it was divided to its ruin and agony through generations into the hostile camps of Catholic and Protestant—North and South—while we are here. That is all we have to say to those who, lying to the workingmen of Wexford, seek to paint *Sinn Féin* as their enemy. It is the creed that saved Ireland from moral and material damnation in the past and will make her a land of free and happy men in the future.<sup>1</sup>

In Irish strikes and lock-outs, Griffith ever saw the sinister hand of the "damned Englishman". "We have been waiting a fortnight for a strike in the English iron-working trade 'in sympathy' with the men locked-out in Wexford. If we could wait a century we should not be its witness. The English iron-workers will never lose a day's pay to support mere Irishmen. 'The solidarity of labour' is a phrase used by the British workingman to get Irishmen to help him in his disputes. It does not work the other way."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Sept. 16, 1911. "The Crisis in Wexford."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1911. "Strikes and Lock-outs in Ireland."

Far more forcefully than the Wexford lock-out, the Irish rail strike

afforded an object-lesson in the value of union with England from which wiser generations will benefit. A few weeks since the railway men of England struck work and the Irish railway men who were not concerned in the dispute were called out in sympathy. On Saturday last the Irish railway men struck work and the English railway men remained comfortably in their jobs. The sauce for the Irish goose is no sauce for the English gander. The mails that were wont to go by the Cove of Cork are now to go by Southampton handled and forwarded by the English "brethren" of the Irishmen on strike. . . . In the game of using Irishmen as catspaws all sections of the English people have shown remarkable proficiency, and not least of those who play that game do we reckon the English chiefs of the Railwaymen's Union who arrived in Dublin this week and adopted a resolution declaring that if a settlement were not arrived at they should "proceed to authorise all the *Irish* railway men to withdraw their labour." Admirable Englishmen! They will "authorise" the Irish to fight while they keep their own countrymen out of the fray. The prospect of an Ireland with its transit held up, an Ireland in whose cities factory after factory will be compelled to shut down and wherein to the hardship of enforced unemployment will be added a rapid advance in the price of food, forms a black picture. It has a bright companion. It is that of the English railway man whistling at his work while the Irish railway man is out doing the fighting. Placed side by side and labelled "English Reciprocity—1911", they will carry a saving lesson to our sons and their sons' sons.<sup>1</sup>

*Sinn Féin* stripped off the gloves and hurled defiance at the Syndicalism of the French Revolutionary Socialists which the Republican Government of France crushed a year ago. The

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Sept. 23, 1911. "Irish Strikes and English Reciprocity."

mask of trades-unionism has been used to cover the introduction of this Syndicalism whose weapon is the sympathetic strike and whose method is terrorism. Trades-unionism stands by displeased but too timid to openly face the blustering demagogues and pinchbeck terrorists who would involve Ireland in a servile war. It is time, truly, for these men to speak out and disabuse the public mind, in which rapidly prejudice against trades-unionism is growing from the notion that trades-unionism and Revolutionary Socialism are the same thing. . . . Against the Red flag of Communism which those responsible for the chaos into which Ireland has been plunged have not had the courage to unfold we raise the flag of an Irish Nation. Under that flag there will be protection, safety, and freedom for all. Tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of the capitalist or of the demagogue terrorist will find no shelter beneath the folds of the Irish nation's flag. And for those who would bid this country bend the knee to the bloody idol of anarchy there is no room beneath a nation's flag. The man who injures Ireland whether he does it in the name of Imperialism or of Socialism is Ireland's enemy. The man who serves her whether he be a capitalist or a labourer, is her friend. Ireland lives to-day because not men of one class but men of all classes spent their lives in her service, and the man who tells the Irish people that Ireland must use all her energies to combat any foe other than the people of England who stand between Ireland and self-government, tells them the lie that maintains foreign rule in this country and keeps poverty enthroned in the most fertile island that the hand of God planted in the bosom of the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>

Not all Sinn Feiners accepted without cavil the teachings of their Prophet Eamonn Ceannt, writing to dissociate himself, as a Sinn Feiner, from Griffith's attitude toward the Wexford dispute, suggested that the latter did not "condescend to analyse any of the principles for which Larkin professes to stand".

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Fein*, Sept. 30, 1911. "The English-made Strike."

No one has now the hardihood to deny that the hardships and miseries of the land agitation were justified. . . . And yet it cannot be denied that the farmers were only a class after all. . . . Would it not be wise to take a leaf out of Parnell's book, if you will not take it out of Larkin's book, as gravely suggested by Padraig Mac Piarais to the Gaelic League on Language Sunday. . . . Now to come to your objection to what you call Mr. Larkin's organisation. Mr. Larkin is an Irishman who has founded in Ireland an Irish union governed by Irishmen. The organisers appear to include one Englishman who went to jail recently for uncomplimentary references to King George V.; Mr. P. T. Daly, ex-prominent Sinn Féin, still presumably a Nationalist; James Connolly, whom you know to be a Nationalist of long standing, and who spoke at the Independent demonstration on June 22nd; Mr. Larkin, a newcomer, whose son learns Irish at Scoil Ite. All four appear to have been associated with Ireland all their lives. There is no reason to doubt their bona fides. Their methods may seem strange to those who are up in the clouds and give not a thought to the labour volcanoes bursting forth all over the Continent of Europe. But practical politics cannot afford to wait while these dreamers are awakened to their new, their startlingly new surroundings. It is the business of Sinn Féin to use the grievances of the various classes in this country as a whip with which to lash the English tyrant out of Ireland. . . . By the way, have you no condemnation of the Employers' Federation, or is there one law for them and another for their servants? <sup>1</sup>

Such protests carried no weight with the editor. "The landlord did not make the soil, . . . . But the Industrialist made the industry, and it depended on his ability, and depends on his ability always, whether it succeeds or fails. The man whom he employs has a perfect right to seek to secure as high a return for his labour as the industry will yield—he has a perfect right to decline to work at it if it

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Sept. 30, 1911.

does not yield him a living wage, but he had no right to assume that he made it, because he didn't." <sup>1</sup> In that which he had earlier denounced as Syndicalism, Griffith now saw nothing but State Socialism.

Persistently hostile as he was to the aims and aspirations of the new Irish labour movement, Mr. Griffith could not but recognise the existence of "oppression and grinding of the face of the poor". But importations were solely responsible. "In this country until recent years the relations of employer and employed were not the inhuman ones that exist in England and other centres of Anglo-Saxon civilisation. . . . There has been a change for the worse in recent years—a hardening of hearts on both sides—for which we have mainly to thank the influence of English employers and the influence of English labour unions over Irish ones." <sup>2</sup> Nothing ever so roused his ire as unnational Irishmen. "Mr. Bernard Shaw performed in his native city on Monday night and following his old trick of playing down to one prejudice of all sections of his audience delighted the wealthy ignorant by throwing in a sneering reference to the language of the country he abandoned to earn a fortune as licensed jester to the British public. Mr. Shaw delivered a humorous address which he entitled 'The Poor Law and Destitution in Ireland'." <sup>3</sup>

Nor could the epic struggle of 1913 budge the stalwart champion of Ireland's nationhood from his hostility to the leaders of social revolt. He acknowledged that "the poor were left to fester in the slums, and when out of their misery some of them have fallen victims to the Socialistic spell-binders, those who left them to be their prey are horri-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Oct. 7, 1911. "Strikes and Socialism."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*., Mar. 8, 1913. "Capital and Labour."

<sup>3</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Oct 8, 1910 "Jesting on Poverty."



fied and amazed".<sup>1</sup> To correspondents his columns were as usual open:

With luxury and extravagance flaunting themselves on all sides, there are unplumbed depths of misery and sordid grinding poverty in every fetid court and alley in Dublin and other Irish cities, want and disease in every crumbling tenement. Smouldering discontent and a sullen sense of enduring wrong, shared by a large section of the population, do not make for social stability and progress. On the contrary, it is one of the greatest menaces, not alone to the present social structure (which would be no great harm, for evil in its origin, an exotic growth in Ireland, it has not justified itself by its results), but to the continuity of the historic Irish nation. Anglicisation has spread like a canker in our cities within the memory of many comparatively young people. The richer folk have long been un-Irish in their sympathies and outlook, but the poorer people and the middle class, until quite recently, were distinctively Irish in most things. The middle classes are still not too far gone on the road to denationalisation, at least Gaelic Leaguers, Sinn Feiners, and Irish Irelanders generally leaven the mass, but the people who were the backbone of all national movements in the past, from '98 to Parnell's days, have steadily kept out of ours, and are devoting any energies which are left in them to improving their own status. They fought for the nation, and asked no reward; they fought for the farmers and got none. One must not blame them, whose condition is worse than that of serfs, for striving for the elementary right to live according to some decent standard of existence. If we cannot secure it for them, we at least need not alienate them, and throw them into the arms of England.

It seems to me that if we do not evolve a national policy designed to give the working classes (almost a term of reproach if not of contempt these days) justice and fair play, as far as we can secure them for them in their own country, we

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 6, 1913 "What the Corporation Could Do."

must be prepared to see the people throw in their lot with the English Labour Party, who, at least give them smooth words and specious promises. While the majority of the Irish people of the classes above the poverty line have nothing but hatred and contempt to pour out upon them if they venture to rebel against the conditions imposed by England, certainly, but acquiesced in and abetted by Irish men and women.<sup>1</sup>

But to this letter was appended the ever-ready reply that "so long as any section of Irishmen can be led to think that earthquake pills are the cure for all ills, and that there is no colourable difference between the green flag of Irish Nationalism and the red banner of English Socialism, so long will such a section of Irishmen be catspaws of England". "To elaborate a national policy at a time when employer and employed are suffering from inflammation of the brain would be a waste of energy."<sup>2</sup>

The action of English trade unionists in sending to Dublin a ship-load of food fanned to fever-heat the passions of the great-souled patriot; furiously did he bellow forth his honourable rage at this insult offered to Irishmen in their hour of trial.

It has been recently discovered that the Irish workingman is not an Irish workingman at all. He is a unit of humanity, a human label of internationalism, a Brother of the men over the water who rule his country. There is nothing to divide him from them except a drop of water. Race, tradition, nationality, are non-entities, and history and its formative influences on character and outlook a figment. He is exalted from the meaningless title of Irishman to the noble one of Brother. His Brothers were formerly called Englishmen, and under that title were improperly regarded by him as his enemies. As Brothers it is obvious they are his friends. They have counselled him to

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Sept. 6, 1913. "The Dublin Riots."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1913. "Labour, Capital, and the Nation."

no longer darken his mind by repeating the reactionary and unenlightened shibboleth, "Ireland for the Irish". "You do not", they say reprovingly, "hear us crying, 'England for the English'"—which is quite true, as they have got it already and will hold on to it like leeches until the boot of the Kaiser is strong enough to dispossess them

The function of an Irish Brother—if we may use the antique adjective—is to Fight. The function of the English Brother is to "stand behind him". In the recent Boer War the English Brother discharged this function with such ability that he only got hit once in twenty times to the Irishman. When the Irish Brother Goes Out the English Stays In to attest the solidarity of "Labour", and give him a helping hand. But he is mindful of the claims upon him. He subscribes one-third of a penny to feed his Irish Brother.<sup>1</sup>

Nor did Griffith neglect to point out that the English Brethren spent the money at home, thus getting some benefit themselves. To a correspondent who reluctantly asked, "Can we blame the Saxon for showing us in a dramatic way our want of common humanity?", he retorted malevolently, "Can we blame the Saxon for showing us in a dramatic way our want of elementary economic sense?"<sup>2</sup> Urged to put aside his "personal dislike to any labour leader or organisation" and "emphasise that persistence in the fatuous attempt of starving a portion of the community is making people class conscious and anxious for reprisal",<sup>3</sup> Griffith could only return to the topic of England's sinister machinations. For £5,000, he said, they had already received an increased market of the value of £50,000, an advertisement for their

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Oct. 4, 1913. "The Economics of the 'Foot-Ship'."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1913. "The Food-Ship"

<sup>3</sup> "The setting of class against class that you say Ireland cannot afford will be the fruit of 'the-right-to-starve-the-women-and-children'-policy."

generosity, and "the use of Dublin as a cockpit for deciding whether the Syndicalist method of discussing industrial disputes might be hereafter tried in England without any danger of causing English trade to go elsewhere".<sup>1</sup>

In vain a correspondent, Seamus O hAodha, protested that to lump England in one for hating purposes is convenient if somewhat primitive, but misleading and unprogressive. . . . Truth demands that we should recognise two Englands—the England of the Octopus and the England of its home-victims. I am aware that this arrangement interferes with a national luxury, luxury of a good blind hate of everything English; . . . The English victims of the English Octopus have lately begun to quarrel with their fate, for they say that we in Ireland are much better off than they are, and the result is the Labour Movement, which is rapidly becoming more Socialistic in character, . . . In this sense and at the present day the interests of Nationalist Ireland and of democratic England run along the same track.

The reply was vehement as usual:

While England is urging the Dublinmen to keep on strike she is sending over her unemployed to take up the strikers' jobs. There is nothing new in all this. It is the history of England's dealings with Ireland for three hundred years—the same old story of Irish credulity and English exploitation. Let Mr. O hAodha raise his eyes from the contemplation of English Friendship, Solidarity of Labour, Co-operative Commonwealth, Universal Brotherhood, and all other Brummagem wares in Cheap Jack's Budget, and look down the quays of Dublin at the naked Truth.<sup>2</sup>

What the Irish workingman wants is a share in the government of his own country, a foothold in his native soil, a fair

<sup>1</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Oct. 18, 1913. "The Economics of the Food-Ship"

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Dec 6, 1913. "Re Nationalists and Labour."

recompense for his labour, and a fair opportunity for his children. But the doctrinaires and the professors know better—what he wants is Brotherhood with the Englishman, Universal Benevolism, the Social Revolution, the Co-operative Commonwealth, and all the rest of the rubbish, and he is to get it by eating Manchester food while England undermines Irish trade and sends her unemployed hither to take up his employment.<sup>1</sup>

Fervent hatred of England threw Griffith into the arms of Archbishop Walsh in opposition to the proposal to take the slum children to England for the duration of the Dublin dispute. While the "very holy man"<sup>2</sup> expressed fear lest the children be discontented with slum conditions when they returned, Griffith boasted that "the number of Dublin parents who would consent to send their children to be nurtured in the homes of the enemies of their race and nation do not form five per cent of the parents affected by the strike. The English labour leaders, Scotch professors, and citizenesses of the world who are panting to take over charge of our affairs in the event of any form of self-government being obtained in the near future in this country burned their fingers badly when they thought the Dublin workingman on strike would permit his children to be used for an advertisement."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he confidently believed that the number of Dublin labourers who would barter the Irish language and political independence for an improvement in their condition was negligible.<sup>4</sup>

Very different was the tone of *Irish Freedom*, launched in November, 1910, as the organ of the Republican wing of Sinn Féin. The very first number carried an article on

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 27, 1913 "The Strike."

<sup>2</sup> Æ's Albert Hall Address. Cf. *The Dublin Strike*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Nov. 1, 1913. "The Deportation of Irish Children."

<sup>4</sup> *Sinn Féin*, Nov. 22, 1913 "Diarmuid Macmurroughism."

"Sweating in Ireland" and a review strongly recommending Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*. According to the new journal, "An investigation amongst some industries that pose as patriotic undertakings would be a revelation to a good many people, and one hopes that someone will undertake it in the near future, for the sooner the truth is driven home that a nation cannot be built up on underpaid labour the better".<sup>1</sup> In explaining "Why Ulster won't Fight", it was pointed out that "the new generation has a shrewd suspicion that whatever form of government is adopted it will still have to slave nine or ten hours a day for a living wage, and it won't make a penny difference in its pay whether a green flag or a Union Jack floats over Dublin Castle".<sup>2</sup> During the rail strike of 1911, *Irish Freedom* attacked *Sinn Féin* for taking the "surest way to rivet the chain of English dictation more tightly round the necks of Irish railway workers" by advocating "unconditional surrender".<sup>3</sup>

The pages of *Irish Freedom* were filled with contributed articles arguing for a union of forces between the Nationalists and the Socialists. "Ireland can never be socially free till England's grip is loosened, but merely to loosen England's grip is to leave the work unfinished. . . . Abusing Socialists will never blind those who use their brains and trace labour disputes not to 'foreign agitators' but to home stupidity and wrongdoing".<sup>4</sup>

Additional force and stability are acquired for a movement for political freedom when joined up with its prototype in industry—the movement for the emancipation of the workers. The two

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Freedom*, Nov., 1910 "Sweating in Ireland"

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb., 1911

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct., 1911

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan., 1913 "Democracy and Separation", by "Crimal".

movements rest upon the same foundations—they are but different manifestations of the same principles, and would form a natural and mutually helpful alliance . . . Behind every attempt to oust the foreigner from this country the mighty instinct of nationalism has been allied to a desire for better economic conditions for the industrial and agricultural workers . . . There is little doubt that the English Empire, being built upon the system of wringing profits from all sorts of ventures regardless of human welfare, provides more opportunities and facilities for the parasites (capitalists) than would be the case in an Irish Republic, whose first care would be for the people. We would soon find that the power of English capital in Ireland was directed against the new State . . . We must not leave a powerful garrison of the enemy in our country.<sup>1</sup>

Such views sometimes evoked protest from other contributors. It was pointed out that in O'Connell's day the National movement had been linked with Catholic Emancipation, in the '80's with the land agitation; the yoke-fellows had ridden in on the neck of Nationalism, which gained nothing itself. Nor had it anything to gain now from an alliance with the workers, "for Ireland will never be freed by day-labourers. Not the obedience of servants, not the obedience of children, not the allegiance of employees, who would transfer that allegiance to a higher bidder, but the love of sons who would sacrifice all for her sake, is what is required from those who would fight for Ireland's liberation." The numerical strength of the "hurlers on the ditch" was not worth the concession of a sop to them.<sup>2</sup>

A quarrel ensued between the two schools. On the one side it was acknowledged that "to struggle for full political

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Freedom*, Jan., 1913. "The Economic Basis of a Revolutionary Movement", by "Northman".

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Freedom*, Feb., 1913 "Democracy and Nationality", by "Rapparee"

independence is very necessary. It is the indispensable foundation upon which any subsequent, any real improvement can be built". Yet,

the Irish workers who think are not very enthusiastic over the Irish Republic as at present presented to them. . . . But this does not stamp them as either slaves or fools. On the contrary they are waking up with a vengeance. The world-wide propaganda of Socialism has taken root in the soil of evil economic conditions as frequent denunciations in press and pulpit and the rising labour agitations go to show. . . . The workers form so large a class as to almost be the nation, as they have only to fold their arms to make quite abundantly clear. The main principle of that revolt known as Socialism comes to this finally:—that as the people produce the wealth and do not get it, the only remedy lies in the common ownership and democratic control of the land, the factories, the railways, and the other means of producing and distributing wealth. This principle and this solution gain ground everywhere today. It has left the theorists and goes among the people. . . . We may trust them to liberate themselves. We need fear neither the Servile State nor the shade of O'Connell. . . . The opposition offered by otherwise far-seeing Sinn Feiners has done enough harm as it is and obscured the essential truth of the Sinn Fein position—that only Ireland can save Ireland in the end <sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the spiritualists scoffed at those who insisted on an extra pair of boots before throwing themselves into Ireland's cause

If he [Casey] <sup>2</sup> means that a free Ireland will be ruled and dominated by a Triumvirate composed of the artisan, the mechanic, and the peasant; that the hewer of wood and the drawer

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Mar., 1913 "Who Says Irish Freedom", by "Criminal".

<sup>2</sup> Sean O'Casey had written, March, 1913, to urge that "there should be union between the Separatist and the railway labourer, the factory hand, and transport worker".



of water will sit in her high places ; and that her last aristocrat will be driven into the sea like a venomous snake at the puissant word of Saint Larkin, then do I pray God that I die before I see that day.<sup>1</sup>

*Irish Freedom* was driven to give editorial definition of the orthodox "Irish Nation".

There are many causes in the great world · International Peace, International Socialism, Emancipation of Women, the Abolition of Wage Slavery, and so on ; their names and designations are legion, and all of us are attracted by one or other of them. But Ireland demands that sacrifice, that we give up the world and these things of the world and give ourselves to Her, poor and lowly and "low in the dust", and without that we shall not be effective. . . .

We have been told many times in the last 15 years that there are many evils which we can remedy without waiting for freedom, and that is true enough. But we must not, and will not, forget freedom in the remedying of minor evils ; and we must, and shall, insist on the obvious truth that there can be no proper development, no reasonable social reconstruction, no permanent solution of any of the problems of a modern Nation, until Ireland as a whole is in a position to consider them and to decide them untrammelled, by any external influences. The independence of this country is the first practical step towards the building up of a decent civilisation.<sup>2</sup>

The Dublin dispute of 1913 drove *Irish Freedom* from this lofty position. "From a Hermitage" Pearse wrote to denounce the horrible conditions existing in Dublin, though blaming them on foreign domination<sup>3</sup> Striving to maintain its poise the Republican organ at first stood aloof.

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Freedom*, April, 1913. "Aristocracy and Nationality", by "Rapparee".

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Freedom*, April, 1913 "The Irish Nation".

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct, 1913 In the same issue Tom Clarke described "Police Hooliganism" in Dublin as being worse than anything in Belfast or on the Bowery.

In all such disputes Ireland loses far more than either party to the dispute can possibly gain. . . . Far be it from us to say that the present strikes have not been justified and necessary. . . . In this paper we stand for the Irish nation and for any part or party within the nation. Into the disputes between the different parts we desire to enter as little as possible. But we wish, if at all possible, to heal breaches within the nation, to avert the war of class against class at a time when every class must stand together to save the nation, to reassert her independence, to rehabilitate our national life <sup>1</sup>

In subsequent comments on "The Labour Upheaval", however, *Irish Freedom*, showed its tendency.

There is a profound significance in this fight, and though we dislike internecine strife in face of our common foe, the Separatists of Ireland must realise that a spiritual revolt has been begun in Dublin. . . . The masters of Dublin went too far when they declared war on the men's organisation, and even the lowest strata of industrial society took up the gauntlet with a promptitude and courage worthy of their race . . . . The cause of Irish liberty is more the cause of the people than the plutocrats, and the new Ireland we work for will not be governed by money-bags. The conception of the nation as a spiritual entity will not be destroyed if Nationalists decide that changes must be made in the social structure before happiness and good-will reign in Ireland, and see that the making of those changes involves a shifting of economic wealth from the possession of the few to the possession of the many. The employers are not to be blamed over much, for they also are so involved in the system that only minor changes are within their power, were they ever so willing. But they stand in the way, nevertheless, and when the profit-making slaves revolt they pull the strings of the English Government to let loose upon the people the mad dogs called "police" and the murderous redcoats.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov, 1913. "Capital and Labour."

On another page of the same issue, *Irish Freedom* remarked:

If foreign Socialistic doctrines are being imported it is as the antidote to the poison of the Capitalist theory, which we also imported. The primary evil is the English occupation, which includes more than the English soldiery, and the cleansing of Ireland from the foreigner will involve the abolition of his inhuman and degrading social system.<sup>1</sup>

The Republicans, like the Young Irelanders of an earlier generation, were prepared to hate an "English system". Notwithstanding, not Socialism, which was but an "English remedy" for an English evil, but Co-operation was held up for admiration as the Gaelic panacea, drawn from the Gaelic past, for the woes of Cathleen-ni-Houlhan.<sup>2</sup>

The Labour Movement, attacked by official Sinn Féin, made no response to the approaches of Sinn Féin's left wing. The Irish Trades Union Congress declined even to commit itself to Home Rule, though wholeheartedly refusing to entertain the idea of Partition. In the course of the Dublin labour war, the Transport Union had sponsored the formation of an Irish Citizen Army.<sup>3</sup> This autonomous body, organised, in imitation of the Ulster Covenanters, for self-protection by force of arms, if need be, suffered a severe blow in the formation, under middle-class auspices, of the National Volunteers, this latter organisation, commanding vastly superior material resources and infinitely greater influence, not only attracted to itself much of the membership of the older force, but refused any assistance to its perpetua-

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Freedom*, Dec., 1913. "Spiritual and Material Development."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ernest Blythe's articles "The Co-Operative Commonwealth" (Feb and Mar., 1913); "Labour Policy" (Nov., 1913); and "The Old-time Farm" (April, 1914). Cf also review of "The Co-Operative Commonwealth", by George Russell, in the issue of May, 1913.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of this body, cf. P. O. O'Cathasaigh, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin and London, 1919).

tion. In this dilemma, the Citizen Army reconstituted itself into a definitely labour unit. By the middle of 1914, this first "Red Army" in modern Europe, claimed a thousand members; its commandant was Jim Larkin.

In November of that year, the "new unionism" lost its pilot; Larkin left for what proved to be a nine years' stay in America. James Connolly, who had himself spent nine years in America, succeeded to the helm as Acting General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and Commandant-General of the Irish Citizen Army. Under his prudently vigorous guidance, industrial action on Syndicalist lines and militant political Nationalism were to be firmly knit. Accepting the identity of the cause of Labour and the cause of Ireland, Irish Labour was to receive in blood its baptism as an integral part of the National movement.

## CHAPTER X

### LABOUR AT ITS APOGEE

THOUGH refusing to support the politicians of any school, Irish Labour, through the Irish Trades Union Congress, had committed itself to a very definite stand on some of the chief political issues. Congress did not directly commit itself to the demand for the political independence of Ireland; indirectly it did so, despite the protests of some Belfast delegates. Thus, in 1909, P. T. Daly, then a Sinn Féiner, moved on behalf of the Dublin Trades Council a resolution, "That inasmuch as the demand for the political independence of Ireland is recognised by all the Congresses of organised workers", all trade unions should be organised on a national basis<sup>1</sup>. As the amalgamated unions had a majority of the delegates, the body of the resolution was converted into a condemnation of national divisions in trade unionism. A delegate "from the North of Ireland, where they did not weep and wail about their country, but tried to work for it", denied "that the political independence of Ireland had ever been recognised by any trades congress",<sup>2</sup> but the preamble was left intact.

The apparent approach of Home Rule most powerfully stimulated Labour's interest in political questions. In 1912, certain features of the Government of Ireland Bill seemed to Congress to make Home Rule even more undesirable than continuance of the Union. "In the proposed measure, large urban centres are ignored, and instead of giving represen-

<sup>1</sup> Report of the 16th Annual Congress, Limerick, 1909, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> H. S. Whitley, Belfast Typographical Society

tation to towns such as Clonmel, Tralee, Wexford, Drogheda, Dundalk, Sligo, Portadown, Lurgan, and Ballymena, it is suggested that the important towns of Galway, Newry, and Kilkenny are to be deprived of direct representation.”<sup>1</sup> Fearing lest the domination of the farmers might be worse than the rule of an alien government, Congress adopted, with but one dissentient, a resolution demanding adequate representation of all urban districts.<sup>2</sup> Despite the expressed dread of “the destruction of that nobility of character for which their women were prized — and rightly prized — all over the world”,<sup>3</sup> Congress also carried a resolution demanding “that such changes shall be effected in the mode of election of members to any Parliament which may be established in Ireland as will secure adult suffrage and the payment of members, of election expenses, and of returning officers’ fees”.<sup>4</sup>

In obedience to the instructions of Congress, a deputation from the Parliamentary Committee interviewed John Redmond, Joseph Devlin, and John Dillon at the Hotel Gresham, Dublin, in July, 1912. To the representations of this deputation, Redmond replied that he “could assure the deputation of their sympathetic consideration”, though Devlin expressed his resentment that it should be “fashionable when anything went wrong to blame the Irish Party”.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, a memorandum of Labour’s demands was sent to Redmond. He, though listening with unfailing courtesy to the remarks of the representatives of Irish Labour, felt

<sup>1</sup> M. J. O’Lehane, Irish Drapers’ Assistants, in his presidential address, Report of 19th Annual Congress, Clonmel, 1912, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52, the mover was Jim Larkin.

<sup>3</sup> James Nolan, National Union of Bookbinders and Machine Rulers, Dublin.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> At Redmond’s request, the Press was excluded from the interview. Report of 20th Annual Congress, Cork, pp. 3-8.

it unnecessary to take the initiative in giving effect to their desires at Westminster. However, he "might assure them that any measure introduced by the Labour Party had almost invariably received their support". Realising the futility of waiting for action by the Irish Parliamentary Party, the more so as on the Railway Bill only one member of that Party did not cast his vote "against giving railwaymen a minimum of 21s. a week",<sup>1</sup> a deputation waited on the Labour Party. Here, too, Irish Labour met with a rebuff; "an important request made to Mr. Barnes was treated with contempt and as a mere Irish affair that did not matter".<sup>2</sup> At the end of January, 1913, Larkin and Daly went to London to lay before the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Labour Party the danger to Irish workers threatened by the Home Rule Bill, as well as a number of grievances arising from the exclusion of Ireland from the operation of a considerable mass of labour legislation, the deputation was refused a hearing, and referred to the new executive of the Labour Party. Mr. Arthur Henderson suggested that the proper medium for the expression of the Irish delegates' views was the Parliamentary Party, which would, he was sure, give "most careful attention to the case presented".<sup>3</sup> Irish Labour was in a wholly anomalous position: the Irish Parliamentary Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party both professed their willingness to support the legislation requested by the Parliamentary Committee of the Irish Trades Union Congress, but neither would take the initiative in introducing such legislation. The one took the position that labour legislation was the

<sup>1</sup> Report of 20th Annual Congress, Cork, 1913, p. 43. The exception was Tim Healy.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Johnson, in opening discussion of the Parliamentary Committee's Report, *ibid*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Report of Parliamentary Committee, *ibid*, pp. 22-23.

province of the Labour Party, and that Party replied that Irish legislation was the province of the Irish Party.

Few among the leaders of Irish Labour were capable of realising the position. While one section of Congress delegates clung to the Nationalist Party as representative of a united Ireland, another clung to the Labour Party as representative of a united labour movement. Only the imminence of Home Rule could convince Congress that the time had really come for Irish Labour to strike out for itself in politics. At Clonmel, in 1912, James Connolly proposed "That the independent representation of labour upon all public boards be, and is hereby included amongst the objects of this Congress", and that affiliated societies "be asked to levy their members 1s. per annum for the necessary expenses".<sup>1</sup> After a two days' debate, and despite the conviction of some delegates that "if they constructed that Congress into a political party" they would sound the death-knell of trade unionism,<sup>2</sup> the resolution was carried by a vote of forty-nine to eighteen. At Cork in the following year Congress took the further step of instructing the Parliamentary Committee to implement the 1912 resolution by redrafting the constitution and standing orders. "In the meantime, in view of the additional duties imposed upon the Parliamentary Committee", Congress made temporary provision for an enlarged Parliamentary Committee, empowered to maintain a more active attention to legislative measures and charged with securing the independent representation of labour upon all public boards.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 19th Annual Report, pp 12-13. This was Connolly's first attendance at Congress

<sup>2</sup> John Murphy, Belfast, Typographical Association. See also Thomas Milner, Dublin, United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers. "This resolution was a vote of censure on the rights of labour in the past" The whole debate occupies pp. 12-19, 19th Annual Report.

<sup>3</sup> Report of 20th Annual Congress, Cork, 1913, pp. 38-41 and 47-48.



The Twenty-First Annual Irish Trades Union Congress was held in Dublin at the beginning of June, 1914.<sup>1</sup> This Congress, at which Irish Labour—whose coming of age had been heralded by the great Dublin dispute of 1913-1914—was to take decisions of momentous import, marks the triumph of the “new unionism”. Larkin was elected to the chair “to honour him for his work for the Trades Union movement”.<sup>2</sup> Connolly’s teachings were in the ascendant. Stimulated by the lessons of 1913, Congress accepted the syndicalist policy; the National Executive Committee was instructed to work for the amalgamation of the existing craft unions into industrial unions.<sup>3</sup> The Irish Transport Union dominated all the proceedings,<sup>4</sup> winning praise on all sides for its stand in 1913 and securing unanimous condemnation of a Belfast firm for attempting what William Martin Murphy and the Dublin Employers’ Federation, Ltd.,

<sup>1</sup> This Dublin Congress of 1914 was composed of 94 delegates, representing 48 distinct trade unions and 5 trades councils. Forty-five of the delegates represented Irish unions or their branches, eight represented trades councils, and forty-one represented amalgamated unions or their Irish branches, though the amalgamated unions paid affiliation fees on a larger membership than did the more numerous Irish unions. The total of £97 6s. 8d. paid in affiliation fees was distributed as follows: Irish unions or branches £39 1s. 4d.; trades councils £8 10s.; amalgamated unions or branches £49 15s. 4d. The leadership rested with the Irish Transport Union, which was represented by a compact body of 17 delegates, and paid affiliation fees of £14 10s. Cf. 21st Annual Report.

<sup>2</sup> Wm. O’Brien in supporting vote of thanks to the Chairman. 21st Annual Report, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> 21st Annual Report, pp. 85-87. The National Union of Railwaymen, formed by the amalgamation of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and of two other societies, took the lead in urging other unions to follow its example. The N. U. R. hoped to combine the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and the Railway Clerks’ Association with its own membership.

<sup>4</sup> One delegate, Wm. O’Brien, “asked if the weather was the only thing the Transport Union could not control”, 21st Annual Report, p. 82.

had failed to accomplish, viz, to have their men sign a declaration that they were not members of, and would not join, the Irish Transport & General Workers Union, or "any similar unskilled labour organisation or union"<sup>1</sup>

Though the necessity for industrial action was by no means overlooked, the attention of this Congress was focussed mainly on political questions. The most important task before the delegates was the consideration of the draft constitution of the Irish Labour Party. This scheme had been evolved by the Parliamentary Committee after long and anxious discussion with representatives of the British Labour Party. In the discussion of the Committee's Report of these negotiations, Connolly urged that the "Congress should put on record its objection to the manner in which the Labour Party consistently flouted every expression of opinion from organised labour in Ireland, if it was opposed by the Home Rule Party in the House of Commons". Johnson and Larkin, on behalf of the Parliamentary Committee, pointed out to Congress that it was the wish of the British Labour Party that Ireland should form a branch of that Party, but that the Irish Parliamentary Committee "held that the Irish Labour Party should not form an organic part of the British Labour Party, but a separate organism", though functioning in "fraternal friendship". There were still Belfast delegates to protest against any breach of the solidarity of labour. "They in Belfast found fault with the Labour Party for not heeding the workers of Ulster, and no one would say the Labour Party was all that it should be, but it was what the workers of Ireland had made it"<sup>2</sup> In reply, members of the Parliamentary

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, pp 93-94. Thomas Johnson, now Secretary of the I L P & T U C, then already prominent in Congress debates, pointed out that this firm had in 1906 attempted to make all its employees cancel their union membership

<sup>2</sup> H. T. Whitley, Typographical Association.

Committee pointed to the unfortunate position of the Scotch Labour Party, whose candidates must be approved by the English Executive, and commented on the unwillingness of the British representatives to concede to an Irish Labour Party its revenue from the political levy on Irish members of amalgamated unions <sup>1</sup>

Under the constitution as adopted, the "Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party" existed

to organise and unite the workers of Ireland in order to improve their status and conditions generally, and to take such action in the Industrial and Political fields, with that end in view, as may be decided upon at its Annual Meetings.

Affiliation was confined to trade unions and trade councils. A few Belfast delegates supported an amendment to admit also co-operative societies and branches of the Independent Labour Party,<sup>2</sup> but Johnson's argument that "the true function of the Socialist bodies was propagandist merely—to educate, not to form a political party" and the general distrust of the Co-operators as "dividend-makers"<sup>3</sup> induced the defeat of this proposal by a vote of 75 to 6. The National Executive, which was to consist of twelve members, including the four officers, and which was to be elected annually by Congress, was charged to endeavour to give effect to the decisions of the Annual Meetings, to watch all legislative measures affecting Labour in Ireland, to initiate such legislative and other action as might be necessary and as Congress might direct, to endeavour to secure the independent representation of Irish Labour in Parliament and upon

<sup>1</sup> W E Hill (London), Railway Clerks' Association, and D. R. Campbell (Belfast), Belfast Trades Council For this discussion see 21st Annual Report, pp 39-42

<sup>2</sup> J. Mercer, Irish Linen Lappers, D Gordon, Flax Roughers and Yarn Spinners, H T Whitley, Typographical Association, p 47.

<sup>3</sup> L Lumley, Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees

all Public Boards, and generally to co-operate with the organised workers in other countries towards the common advancement of labour. Though any affiliated body might nominate a candidate for Parliament, no candidature could be promoted until endorsed by the National Executive; election expenses were to "be borne by the body or bodies nominating a candidate with such financial assistance as the Central Funds can afford."

In addition to the foregoing objects, it shall be the duty of the National Executive to assist in adjusting all differences, on the request of the trade affected, between employers and employees and to aid affiliated bodies in their efforts to improve the conditions of employment.<sup>1</sup>

The new Standing Orders preserved the old safeguards against "bounders on the hop" being seated as delegates, as well as the penny-a-head rule in affiliation fees. To prevent the politicians from worming their way into the new Party, it was provided that

Candidates for public bodies must be and remain members in good standing of a labour organisation eligible for affiliation to this Congress, and must continue to be members thereof so long as they retain their seats. They shall also pledge themselves to accept this Constitution, agree to abide by the decisions of the Annual Meetings and National Executive in carrying out the aim of this Constitution; appear before their constituency under the title of labour candidates only, and abstain strictly from identifying themselves with or promoting the interests of any candidature not endorsed by the National Executive.

A severe struggle was waged over the method of voting. The draft scheme continued the old system of voting by

<sup>1</sup> For the draft Constitution, see 21st Annual Report, pp 20-22; the discussion occupies pp 43-49

show of hands, tellers being chosen at the opening of Congress. The amalgamated societies attempted to secure the introduction of the card system: "They must give extra voting power to the big societies giving big subscriptions, and these would not submit to be outvoted by the 'intellectuals'." <sup>1</sup> Their plea was unavailing; too many of the delegates had seen thousands of votes cast at British Congresses on the card system by men who, ignoring the resolutions of their branches, followed their own inclinations. It was held that if small societies showed their "high sense of public spirit and working class solidarity" by sending more delegates than the large unions, they deserved to dominate the Congress. As Connolly put it, he hoped "they would retain their power and their aggressive spirit". <sup>2</sup>

Thus Irish Labour launched itself on its political career. It was to wait several long years for the opportunity to try its strength in a Parliamentary election. A scant two months after the forging of the new weapon, England's entrance into the Great War was to pave the way for the resurrection of the "Irish Question" in the most perilous guise it had yet assumed. Another three months and Larkin's departure for America left James Connolly in virtually absolute command of the Irish labour movement. Before examining his conduct of that movement, it is necessary to note the position taken by Congress in 1914 on the then proposed solution of the Irish problem.

The continued efforts of the Parliamentary Committee to

<sup>1</sup> McCarron, T. MacParlin, a delegate from the Dublin Trades Council, called attention to the shortsighted policy of the skilled amalgamateds. "In Ireland unskilled labour had been badly organised till lately, now there was a wave of organisation among the unskilled; and if the card system were adopted the Transport Union might soon be able to swamp all others"

<sup>2</sup> For the draft Standing Orders, *cf. ibid.*, pp. 22-24; the discussion occupies pp. 50-59 and 91-92.

secure amendments to the Government of Ireland Bill were endorsed by the delegates. Informed that owing to gerrymandering of the constituencies the urban population, though forming one-third of the whole population, would have only one-fifth of the representation, Congress reaffirmed its demand for a revision of the Schedule to give adequate representation to the urban areas.<sup>1</sup> With this, Congress coupled a demand for proportional representation and for the Parliamentary representation of the women of Ireland.<sup>2</sup> All other political issues, however, sank into insignificance before the threatened exclusion of Ulster from the provisions of the Home Rule Bill.

Against Partition all sections of the workers—those who had welcomed with delight the prospect of Home Rule, those who “regarded the Home Rule Bill with contempt as an emasculation of the Irish National demand”,<sup>3</sup> and those “who would oppose Home Rule to the point of giving their lives”<sup>4</sup>—joined hands resolutely. A delegate from the Cork United Trades & Labour Council argued that “Partition would reduce the Labour vote in the Home Rule Parliament. He denied the right of any man or set of men to upset the geography of Ireland.”<sup>5</sup> A Dublin tailor added that “Irishmen had been fighting through the ages for their inheritance and they must get it in its integrity . . . Every revolutionary movement had been cradled in Ulster”<sup>6</sup> Connolly himself, to whom it was by no means clear that Home Rule, even with Ulster, could be accepted as the true inheritance of Irishmen in its integrity, had hoped for the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, pp 61-63

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp 63-70.

<sup>3</sup> Connolly.

<sup>4</sup> Whitley.

<sup>5</sup> Councillor M Egan

<sup>6</sup> Councillor T Lawlor.

passage of the Home Rule Bill "because bigotry had been used to weaken the working class". A united and autonomous Ireland would have made it possible for the workers to unite politically on labour issues; exclusion, even for six years, meant the perpetuation of the stupid alliance of a section of the working class with their employers against their fellow-workers and contrary to their own interests. "They valued Ulster too much to let it be cut off; it was in Ireland now and they meant it to grow part of Ireland. The frontiers of Ireland were fixed by Nature not by the bigotry, malevolence, or class-creed of any party" A Belfast printer, "speaking for large numbers of those who signed the Covenant", said Ulster would not have Home Rule but would "just as obstinately refuse to have Ireland cut up . . . Ireland was theirs and Ireland they were going to keep . . . He was not speaking on the merits of Home Rule."<sup>1</sup> A delegate from the Belfast Trades Council added that that body had "never voted on Home Rule, but had emphatically protested against partition. . . . There had been talk about wooing the capitalists of Ulster. The Irish Parliament would not dare to promote labour legislation; they would be told that there must be no interference with labour lest they might frighten off the capitalists of Ulster. Labour in Ulster would be nobody's child; it would be very hard to get Westminster legislation to apply to Ulster."<sup>2</sup> Of the 94 delegates—including 17 from Belfast, 3 from Derry, and 4 from Great Britain—84 voted for Connolly's resolution condemning any form of partition; two only voted against the resolution, one without explaining his reasons, the other feeling in duty bound to vote against any political resolution. Even he "was not in favour of exclusion from the point of view of the interests of the Irish worker", but

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Whitley.

<sup>2</sup> D. R. Campbell

"he could not support the resolution, because of the men who sent him there".<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1914 Irish Labour stood ready to participate in the political field under any government that might possess authority in Ireland. Unlike the British Labour Party, the Irish Labour Party was intimately identified with the Trade Union Congress. The one organisation was to control both political and industrial action. Three of the twelve members of the National Executive, including two of the four officers, were members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.<sup>2</sup> Behind the scenes stood the Irish Citizen Army—an autonomous Labour unit, but actually tied by the bonds of "personal union" to the Transport Workers, from whom it rented its headquarters in Liberty Hall.

This promising revolutionary movement shared in the general set-back to European labour movements consequent on the outbreak of the war. But unlike the labour movement in other countries, the leaders of Irish Labour rose manfully to the occasion, openly denouncing the war and discouraging recruiting. Early in December, 1914, the *Irish Worker* was suppressed; shortly before, Larkin had left for America. Connolly's opportunity had come, and he used it to the full. Never neglecting the vigorous prosecution of the never-ceasing struggle between the Transport Union and the Dublin Employers' Federation, Connolly set himself to the task of harmonising the Labour and Republican movements. Liberty Hall, whose façade flaunted the proud device, "We serve neither King nor Kaiser", became the focus of resistance to the British government and its Irish adherents,—the master class and their press jackals.

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Hall, Typographical Association, Belfast branch. For this debate, see 21st Annual Report, pp 70-72

<sup>2</sup> Larkin, Vice-President, Daly, Secretary, and Connolly.



He, who first in modern Ireland dared openly to raise the demand for an Irish Republic, never wavered in his purpose. In the *fin de siècle* atmosphere of 1896, when Parnell's sworn and forsworn lieutenants, with the usual ghoul-ishness of Irish politicians, were squabbling over the disposition of his carcass, when the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which like the Land League had been devitalised by contact with Parnell, James Connolly had launched the Irish Socialist Republican Party, with its clear-cut demand for the absolute independence of Ireland. In May, 1915, the editor of the original *Workers' Republic* founded a new *Workers' Republic*. At a time when the labour leaders of Europe had abandoned the gospel of class revolt to devote all their energies to the prosecution of a fratricidal war, this paper held steadily before the eyes of the Irish working class the struggle for their own emancipation.

In the long run the freedom of a nation is measured by the freedom of its lowest class, every upward step of that class to the possibility of possessing higher things raises the standard of the nation in the scale of civilisation; every time that class is beaten back into the mire, the whole moral tone of the nation suffers. Contemned and despised though he be yet the rebellious docker is the sign and symbol to all that an imperfect civilisation cannot last, for slavery cannot survive the awakened intelligence of the slave.

To increase the intelligence of the slave, to sow broadcast the seeds of that intelligence, that they may take root and ripen into revolt, to be the interpreter of that revolt, and finally to help in guiding it to victory, is the mission we set before ourselves in the columns of the *Workers' Republic*.<sup>1</sup>

Pregnant for the future was a weekly feature, "Irish Citizen Army Notes".

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, May 29, 1915.

At a time when everybody is talking of military matters, it would be mere affectation, or worse, to attempt to exclude such from our columns. Hence we keep in the fashion by our Citizen Army notes, which deals with the lessons of military science as exemplified in campaigns of similar bodies of armed citizens in other countries in the past.<sup>1</sup>

The Citizen Army had been founded during the Dublin lock-out of 1913.

Three men had been killed, and one young Irish girl murdered by a scab, and nothing was done to bring the assassins to justice. So since justice did not exist for us, since the Law instead of protecting the rights of the workers was an open enemy, and since the armed forces of the crown were unreservedly at the disposal of the enemies of Labour, it was resolved to create our own Army to secure our rights, to protect our members, and to be a guarantee of our own free progress.<sup>2</sup>

Captain White, D.S.O.,<sup>3</sup> threw in his lot with the workers and formulated a project for the conversion of the "hopeless, haphazard crowds" into disciplined battalions. The idea was announced by Jim Larkin in one of his usual nightly addresses from a window of Liberty Hall.<sup>4</sup> Croy-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, May 29, 1915

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, October 30, 1915

<sup>3</sup> This British army officer, son of the hero of Ladysmith, and lecturer at Trinity College, was infuriated at the conduct of the police in Sackville (O'Connell) Street, on that August Sunday morning. One of his students relates how, at his next class, he invited the Trinity students to attend a meeting in the Antient Concert Room, where Connolly was to speak. Stimulated by the Provost's published prohibition of such action, the students paraded to the meeting in a body and took their seats on the platform.

<sup>4</sup> The inception of the Citizen Army is a matter of contention. The published version, by P. O'Cathasaigh, has been adopted here. By Larkin the idea of a Citizen Army is credited to James Fearon, who, in 1908, "organised 500 Cork men" in a "Civil Army". Cf. Report of General Meeting of No. 1 Branch Members at La Scala Theatre, Dublin, on Sunday, June 3, 1923.

don Park, which had been leased by the Transport Union as an amusement ground for its members, was used as a drill-ground; Captain White was drill-master. The subsequent defection of certain elements of the Citizen Army to the Irish Volunteers suggested the conversion of the Citizen Army into a definitely labour unit. As a general meeting in Liberty Hall, March 22, 1914, presided over by Jim Larkin, a Constitution framed to that end was adopted and an Army Council, with Captain White as Chairman, was elected.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of October, 1915, the Citizen Army was described in the pages of the *Workers' Republic* as follows:

Its constitution pledged and still pledges its members to work for an Irish Republic and for the Emancipation of Labour. It has ever been foremost in all national work, and while never neglecting its own special function has always been at the disposal of the forces of Irish nationality for the ends common to all. . . Neither Home Rule nor the lack of Home Rule, will make them lay down their arms. However it may be for others, for us of the Citizen Army there is but one ideal—an Ireland ruled, and owned, by Irish men and women, sovereign and independent from the centre to the sea, and flying its own flag outward over all the oceans . . . The Citizen Army will only co-operate in a forward movement. The moment that forward movement ceases it reserves to itself the right to step out of the alignment, and advance by itself if needs be, in an effort to plant the banner of Freedom one reach further towards its goal. If you believe in that spirit help our fund. If you are men follow your donation into our ranks.<sup>2</sup>

Advantage was taken of every industrial dispute to increase the strength of the Red Army. In the late autumn of 1915 occurred a series of lock-outs at the North Wall docks.

<sup>1</sup>The other officers were *Vice-Chairman* Jim Larkin, P. T. Daly, Councillor W. Partridge, Thomas Foran, F. Sheehy-Skeffington; *Hon. Secretary*. Sean O' Cathasaigh; *Honorary Treasurers*: Richard Brannigan, Countess Markievicz.

<sup>2</sup>*Workers' Republic*, Oct. 30, 1915.

Company after company locks out its men, and we bring them up to Liberty Hall and take advantage of the opportunity to drill and train them. When each dispute is settled that squad of men goes back to work, and some other squad gets locked out, and we get a chance to train *them*. Thus the whole quay is getting drilled, and the Irish Citizen Army has a larger reserve of drilled fighting men than any force in Dublin . . . The great danger is that the dispute may be over before the men are thoroughly drilled. And when it is over the men will be back to work at the same rates of pay as their brothers have been conceded. And not a penny less.<sup>1</sup>

The Transport Union was engaged in strike after strike, nor did it confine its support to its own members—"For our brothers' Cause IS our Cause"<sup>2</sup> The employees of the Dublin South Eastern Railway, refused support by their own union, won a 2s. increase through the assistance of the Transport Union.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the seamen and firemen, who refused to work ships loaded by "scab" labour and who were refused strike pay by Havelock Wilson, were taken under the wing of the Transport Union<sup>4</sup> The most serious threat came from William Martin Murphy, who urged the master carriers to renew the 1913 lock-out, on the ground that the "military regime in the country gave the employers an unexampled opportunity"<sup>5</sup> Fearing that the Government might resent a lock-out and the consequent stoppage of Irish munitions, or that it might proceed against them

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Nov. 6, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Feb 12, 1916

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, July 31, 1915 and August 14, 1915 W P Partridge complained that the N U R was investing £35,000 in Corporation stock, while the Transport Union was spending £600 in strike pay on behalf of members of the N U. R

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, December 25, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, Nov. 13, 1915. Cf. *Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 8, 1915.

under the Defence of the Realm Act, the masters concluded to defer decisive action till after the war.

Keenly alive to the peril of a post-war drive against Labour—and against the Transport Union in particular—, Connolly covered with contumely those trade-union leaders who were so ill-advised as to grant concessions under the plea of war necessity.

The Trade Union that secedes from the ranks of the Labour Movement because that movement scorns to aid the invader in his murderous conspiracy against a free nation, the trade union that exults in the prospect of being allowed to prostitute its skill in the furtherance of the work of making weapons of murder which may first be used on its own fellow citizens, the trade union that rushes in to proclaim that Irishmen should sacrifice more for the British Empire than Englishmen should—that trade union is a worthy descendant of those who in the past in the armies of the invader saw not the assassins of their country's liberty, but only prospective customers from whom an Irish slave might derive a slave's profit.<sup>1</sup>

The British Trades Union Congress was described as a "sorrowful spectacle"; all hope from the British working class was gone.<sup>2</sup> The Triple Alliance of miners, railway men, and transport workers would have been amusing, had it not been disgusting.

A close study of the . . . constitution leads us to believe that the framers of it were mainly interested in devising a scheme to *prevent* united action rather than to facilitate it. The frequent rebellion of the rank and file against stupid and spiritless leadership, and the call of the rank and file for true industrial unity seems to have spurred the leaders on, not to respond to the new spirit but to evolve a method whereby under the forms of

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Sept. 25, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 18, 1915.

unity the new spirit could be trammelled and fettered. . . . It is the usual English method, copied from their lords and rulers, of strangling real freedom whilst parading the forms of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Only once in the war years did Irish Labour enter the political arena. The death of J. P. Nannetti, M.P. for College Green, Dublin, necessitated a bye-election for that division in June, 1915. Though Labour was reluctant to recognise English rule by participating in a contest for a seat at Westminster, the selection of John Dillon Nugent<sup>2</sup> as candidate of the United Irish League provoked the nomination of a labour candidate by the Dublin Trades Council. The name of John Dillon Nugent was anathema to Irish Labour.

He has set Irishman against Irishman, brothers against brothers, has broken up family ties and the ties of the community, and been the ready agent of every evil thing that sought to darken the National soul and sully the character of the race. He is the incarnation and flowering of the results upon Irish character of seven centuries of slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Though the supporters of the labour nominee, whose candidacy had been undertaken at the eleventh hour, had been seriously handicapped by shortage both of time and funds—they were not able to canvass a single street<sup>4</sup>—, he polled 1,816 votes against the 2,445 cast<sup>5</sup> for the man backed by the A O H and the United Irish League<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Feb 12, 1916

<sup>2</sup> He was a leading figure in the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

<sup>3</sup> *Workers' Republic*, June 12, 1915

<sup>4</sup> Report of 22nd Annual Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, p. 5 and p 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitutional Year Book for 1916*, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> These two organisations are notorious as twin elements of corruption, whose secret working has contributed so powerfully to the perpetuation of sectarian issues in Ireland

Fearless opposition to the war, to which was coupled, with steadily increasing clarity, the advocacy of an armed rebellion against "the bloody Empire on which the sun is ashamed to set",<sup>1</sup> was never relaxed. Though the Government did not dare to include Ireland in the operation of the Conscription Act, every effort was made to compel the "voluntary" enlistment of Irishmen in the British Army. In the work of "economic conscription", Irish employers were all too willing to cooperate. Men of military age, particularly if staunch trade unionists, were "released" from their employment. The "Enlist or Starve" policy, so strongly reminiscent of 1913, provoked from Connolly the comment that

All up and down the city the loyal capitalists are weeding out Irishmen and slyly substituting English and Scots—Brit Huns—in their places. The Irish are wanted to fight the battles of the tottering British Empire—to set the "glorious example" of dying for the Empire that denies their country the merest shadow of national freedom—and as the Irish will not go willingly they must be starved into going.<sup>2</sup>

Mindful of the outcry of Irish "patriots", including the heads of the A.O.H., in 1913 against sending Irish children "to be corrupted" in English homes for the duration of the lock-out, Connolly called attention to the fact that a number of Irish girls had been taken to England to work in munition factories.

No indignant protests against these deportations have been heard of from the people who raised such outcries in Dublin when homes in England were being provided for some of the children of the starving strikers. No A. O. H. rowdies have attempted to prevent these young Irish maidens from being sold

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Feb. 19, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Feb. 5, 1916.

into slavery. Although every trade unionist in England protests that the Munition Act binds the workers hand and foot in galling bondage, the vile crew that shrieked out their lies against us in 1913 are now openly conniving at the deportation of young Irish girls to England to serve in that bondage, without a trade union, without a counsellor, without a friend to help them should they repent of the bargain they have made in their innocence and ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

Blundering from slogan to slogan, the British recruiters in Ireland did yeoman service for Connolly's propaganda till at long last they hit upon the idea that "the trenches are safer than the Dublin slums".

It is the English idea of wit . . . But you can die honourably in a Dublin slum . . . Who are they who in press and on platform pour their praises upon the heroism of our poor brothers whom they have driven or coaxed to the front? . . . Why, they are the men who locked us out in 1913, the men who solemnly swore that they would starve three-fourths of the workers of Dublin in order to compel them to give up their civil rights—the right to organise. The recruiters in Dublin and in Ireland generally are the men who pledged themselves together in an unholy alliance to smash trade unionism, by bringing hunger, destitution, and misery in fiercest guise into the homes of Dublin's poor.

On every recruiting platform in Dublin you can see the faces of the men who in 1913-14 met together day by day to tell of their plans to murder our women and children by starvation, and are now appealing to the men of those women and children to fight in order to save the precious skins of the gangs that conspired to starve and outrage them. . . . They are the men who set the police upon the unarmed people in O'Connell Street, who filled the jails with our young working class girls, who batoned and imprisoned hundreds of Dublin workers, who

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Feb. 26, 1916.



wrecked and pillaged the poor rooms of the poorest of our class, who plied policemen with drink, suborned and hired perjurers to give false evidence, murdered Byrne and Nolan and Alice Brady, and in the midst of a Dublin reeking with horror and reeling with suffering and pain publicly gloated over the misery and exulted in their power to get three square meals per day for their overfed stomachs.

These are the recruiters. Every Irish man or boy who joins at their call gives these carrion a fresh victory over the Dublin Working Class—over the Working Class of all Ireland.

"The trenches safer than the Dublin slums." We may yet see the day that the trenches will be safer for these gentry than any part of Dublin<sup>1</sup>

As the war wearily wore on, preparations for the "Great Adventure"<sup>2</sup> of Easter Week went on apace. A meeting of employers had been held in the Mansion House, November 23rd, 1915 to promote recruiting; William Martin Murphy played a prominent role. Here was formulated that scheme of disguised conscription to be enforced by starvation. "The carrying out of this plan", wrote Connolly, "means the end of the historic Irish Nation. The peaceful carrying out of it means that the Irish Nation will end *in dishonour*."<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks later Connolly wrote to welcome and encourage the growth of "that feeling of identity of interests between the forces of real Nationalism and of Labour which we have long worked and hoped for in Ireland".

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Feb 26, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> "The spirit of adventure then must be reckoned with among the many factors that help to drive men into the profession of hired assassins. ... But it must also be counted amongst the forces that make for revolutions. The revolutionists of the past have ever been adventurous spirits, else they would never have been revolutionists." *Workers' Republic*, Feb. 19, 1916

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1915, cf *Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 24, 1915.

We cannot conceive of a Free Ireland with a subject Working Class; we cannot conceive of a Subject Ireland with a Free Working Class . . . We do not believe that the existence of the British Empire is compatible with either the Freedom or the Security of the Irish Working Class.<sup>1</sup>

By January 1916, in outlining Labour's programme, the *Workers' Republic* urged "that the time for Ireland's Battle is NOW, the place for Ireland's Battle is HERE" To wait for peace before striking would be arrant folly. "We will be no party to leading out Irish patriots to meet the might of an England at peace"<sup>2</sup> Week after week came the keen questioning: "Are we waiting too long?" An attempt was made by the Government to raid Liberty Hall on March 24, 1916; the raid was successfully resisted by the Citizen Army.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of April the decision was taken to hoist the Green Flag of Ireland over Liberty Hall.

Where better could that flag fly than over the unconquered citadel of the Irish Working Class, Liberty Hall, the fortress of the militant Working Class of Ireland. We are out for Ireland for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-renting, slum-owning landlord, not the sweating, profit-grinding capitalist, not the sleek and oily lawyer, not the prostitute pressman—the hired liars of the enemy. Not these are the Irish upon whom the future depends. Not these, but the Irish Working Class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared. The CAUSE of Labour, is the CAUSE of Ireland, the CAUSE of Ireland is the CAUSE of Labour They cannot be dissevered. Ireland seeks Freedom Labour seeks that an Ireland Free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, Dec 18, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Workers' Republic*, Jan 22, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*., April 1, 1916.

her soil Labour seeks to make the Free Irish Nation the guardian of the interests of the people of Ireland, and to secure that end would vest in that Free Irish Nation all property rights as against the claims of the individual . . . Having in view such a high and holy function for the Nation to perform, is it not well and fitting that we of the Working Class should fight for the Freedom of the Nation from foreign rule, as the first requisite for the free development of the National powers needed for our Class? <sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, behind the scenes was proceeding a curious union of forces. A fighting schoolmaster, poet and idealist, had been coming, haltingly but surely, to appreciate Connolly's interpretation of Ireland's nationhood. Patrick Pearse <sup>2</sup> never accepted the full teachings of Socialism; nor did he ever participate in the labour movement. Aloof from the material forces operating in Dublin, he nevertheless acknowledged the "material basis of freedom". Larkin he admired from afar; with Connolly he became intimate. In *The Sovereign People* he accepted much of the latter's teaching; the doctrine that the undeniable social evils existent in Ireland were the fruit of foreign domination permitted Pearse, as it had permitted a few of the Young Irelanders, to come very close to a Socialistic point of view. Thus came about that junction of forces between militant Labour and the Republican idealists. With Pearse came that small but devoted group of young intellectuals who had sought, in the pages of *Irish Freedom*, to give a Republican twist to the Sinn Fein movement. With these two groups associated itself the remnant of the old physical force party, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Thomas Clarke, who had spent long years in English gaols for his devotion to the Repub-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, April 8, 1916

<sup>2</sup> For a more extended account, see Desmond Ryan, *The Man Called Pearse* (Dublin, 1919)

lican cause, joined hands with Pearse and Connolly. It was this trinity of convergent but dissimilar elements that planned and carried out the Easter Rising

The rebellion, hopeless but far from futile, paved the way for the triumph of Sinn Féin—at the price of its identity. Much as the participants might resent being confounded with mere Sinn Féiners, the confusion was too deep-rooted to be resisted. A new Sinn Féin, definitely Republican, and professing its sympathy for the aims of Labour, was to arise out of the ruins in O'Connell Street. The proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916 declared "the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible".<sup>1</sup> Despite the ambiguity of this phraseology, Connolly's signature to the document can leave no doubt as to how he, at least, understood it. For Labour, the Rising had the most profound significance. It was the first time in Irish history that the workers had not been mere pawns in the game of the revolutionists. Labour had done more than furnish the rank and file; Labour had furnished an independent unit, the Citizen Army, to the military forces of rebellion. Still more, Labour had supplied one of the three instigators of revolt<sup>2</sup> and through him had shared in the formulation of the Republican creed—a creed that could not be lightly thrown aside by the legatees of the Rising.

<sup>1</sup> The full text of this proclamation is most conveniently to be found in Nora Connolly, *The Irish Rebellion of 1916 or The Unbroken Tradition* (New York, 1918), opp p 44. It may be of interest to note that the proclamation was not printed in the report of the official British inquiry into the Dublin disturbance (*Parl Papers*, 1916, XI [Cd 8279], [Cd. 8311.])

<sup>2</sup> According to his biographer, Connolly was the one of the three who was most militant. Cf. D. Ryan, *James Connolly*, p. 124

## CHAPTER XI

### FROM THE RISING TO THE TREATY

FOR its new place in the affairs of the Irish Nation Labour paid a heavy price. James Connolly was dead. Hounded to the end by William Martin Murphy, patriot and head of the Dublin Employers' Federation, Ltd.,<sup>1</sup> Connolly had been shot on May 12th, 1916. Suffering from a gangrenous wound at the time of his surrender, he had been carefully nursed till strong enough to sit in a chair and be shot in due form. His body lay in a lime-pit in Kilmain-

<sup>1</sup> "No terms of denunciation that pen could indite would be too strong to apply to those responsible for the insane and criminal rising of last week" (Leader in the first issue of the *Irish Independent* after the Rising, dated April 26 to May 4, 1916). Day after day this paper editorially urged leniency for the "young fellows who went out, . . . innocent, ignorant, misguided, and irresponsible" (*do*), but "as regards the leaders . . ., any feeling of sympathy will be checked" (May 5). On May 10 the *Independent* published Connolly's picture with the legend "Still lies in Dublin Castle slowly recovering from his wounds". The leader that day urged "Let the worst of the ringleaders be singled out and dealt with as they deserve". Be it noted that 12 executions had already been reported. On May 12 the *Independent* dissociated itself from the growing demand for leniency to all survivors: "Certain of the leaders remain undealt with, and the part they played was worse than that of some of those who have paid the extreme penalty . . . We think in a word that no special leniency should be extended to some of the worst of the leaders whose cases have not yet been disposed of." Next day the *Independent* had the satisfaction of announcing the death of "Larkin's chief lieutenant"; the leader of that day joined in the general demand for lenient treatment of all other survivors. The *Irish Independent*, owned by Wm M. Murphy, had been founded at the time of the Parnell split to defend Parnell's memory from the *Freeman's Journal*. See also Murphy's statement to the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1916, XI (Cd. 8279, Cd. 8311, and Cd. 8376).

ham yard<sup>1</sup> Richard O'Carroll, another member of the National Executive, and leader of the Labour Party in the Dublin Corporation, had been killed in the fighting, so had several other of the more active trade-union officials<sup>2</sup>

But the irretrievable loss of so many leaders was not the whole penalty. The British Government swooped down heavily on the trade unions. P. T. Daly, Secretary of the Congress, and William O'Brien, a prominent member of the Executive and an intimate friend of James Connolly, were arrested and deported to English prisons. Public meetings, under which description were included trade-union meetings, were forbidden by proclamation. As the British had destroyed by shell-fire the heart of Dublin, trade and industry were seriously dislocated for some weeks. The consequent unemployment and distress caused a heavy drain on the finances of Irish unions.

In this crisis the responsibility devolved necessarily on those officials who were in no way implicated in the Rising. From Belfast, Thomas Johnson, Chairman of the National Executive, and David Campbell, Treasurer, set themselves to the task of drawing together the scattered strength of the Irish labour movement. Dissociating the labour movement as a whole from any responsibility for the rebellion, they demanded the immediate trial or release of the imprisoned trade-union officials and the return of all books and papers seized by the military. Through the assistance of the British Labour Party and of the Parliamentary Committee of the British Trades Union Congress they were able to effect

<sup>1</sup> The body was refused to the family. The place of "burial" was pointed out to the writer by a British officer left in charge after the Treaty. Cf. also Nora Connolly, *The Irish Rebellion of 1916 or The Unbroken Tradition*.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-second Annual Report, Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, Sligo, 1916, p. 17.

the return of a large portion of their records in time to hold an Irish Congress at Sligo, in August, 1916. The imprisoned officials were also released.<sup>1</sup>

No Congress had been held in 1915 "as it was felt that the intense political feelings engendered by the war would probably inject themselves into the proceedings of Congress with the possible result that in the heat of passion things might be said and done that would cause irreparable breaches in the ranks of Labour. Notably it was apprehended that the position of many of the delegates from the North would be seriously compromised, and the adhesion of their Unions to the Congress endangered, if any discussion on the war should be brought on and result in the deliverance of any anti-British pronouncement from leading delegates."<sup>2</sup> However, the prolongation of the war had made it seem advisable to arrange for a Congress at Whitsuntide, 1916, though the dangers and difficulties that might arise were fully appreciated. In consequence of the Rising and the subsequent raids and arrests, Congress had to be postponed till August.

At Sligo were represented practically all the unions affiliated to the Congress and Labour Party in 1914. Though only forty-two unions paid affiliation fees as against fifty-three just before the war, the missing unions were not important; on the other hand, two powerful unions had been added to the membership—the Dublin Corporation Workmen and the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union. Belfast sent sixteen delegates, Newry one, and Derry three, as against forty-one from Dublin, seven from Cork, two from Limerick, and one from Galway. Sligo itself was represented by six delegates, while Dundalk and Drogheda sent one each. Hill, who had resigned his seat on the National

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-13

<sup>2</sup> *Workers' Republic*, April 15, 1916.

Executive, came as usual from London to represent the Railway Clerks' Association. Nineteen amalgamated unions, eighteen Irish unions, and five Trades Councils composed the membership.

Under the circumstances official Labour shrank back from the bold position that James Connolly had prepared for it. Thomas Johnson, presiding over the deliberations of Congress, struck in his opening address the keynote, not alone of that Congress, but of labour policy in the years to follow:

As a Trade Union Movement we are of varied minds on matters of history and political development, and, consequently, this is not a place to enter into a discussion as to the right or the wrong, the wisdom or the folly of the revolt, but this we may say, that those amongst the rebels who have been associated with us in the past, who have led and inspired some of us with their love of their country and their class, were led to act as they did with no selfish thought but purely with a passion for freedom and a hatred of oppression.

And while laying these wreaths on the graves of our comrades who gave their lives for what they believed to be the Cause of Ireland's Freedom—let us also remember those many others (some of whom had been chosen in years past to attend our Congresses) who have laid down their lives in another field, also for what they believed to be the Cause of Liberty and Democracy and for Love of their Country.

In that spirit (of Connolly before the firing squad) I ask all present, whatever their views may be in regard to the war or the rebellion, to rise for a moment in token of respect for all our comrades who have been brave enough to give their lives for the cause they believed in.<sup>1</sup>

The National Executive, in its Report, refused "to con-

<sup>1</sup> 22nd Annual Report, I T U C & L. P. (1916), pp 21-23.



sider the rightfulness, or otherwise, of recent events in our land", but affirmed "that in the deaths of James Connolly and Richard O'Carroll, staunch Trade Unionists and champions of the rights of the common people, this country suffers deep and irreparable loss".<sup>1</sup> In its anxiety to escape further penalty and possible disruption of the ranks of organised labour, the Executive recorded no protest against the executions. Further, "in order to remove a false impression regarding one of our affiliated societies which has been deliberately created by the capitalist Press and the authorities for the purpose of discrediting that organisation", the Executive cited the testimony of Major Price, of the Army Intelligence Department, that "the Citizen Army at the time of the outbreak comprised about 200 men", adding that "not more than half of these were members of the Transport Union". The Executive was careful to point out that the Citizen Army had occupied rooms in Liberty Hall merely as tenants, and not because of any connection with the Transport Union.<sup>2</sup> This was too much for one of the delegates:

Residing as he did in England he was aware that it would bring ridicule upon the Transport Workers' Union and the labour movement generally if the Transport Workers' Union attempted or desired to disassociate themselves from the Citizen Army. The Citizen Army was the direct outcome of the struggle in which the Transport Workers' Union had been involved: it was formed and officered by the Transport Workers' Union.<sup>3</sup>

The protest was withdrawn in view of the statement of Thomas Foran, General President of that union, that

<sup>1</sup> 22nd Annual Report, I T. U. C. & L. P (1916), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 12-13

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Hill, Railway Clerks' Association, London, p. 36.

the Transport Workers' Union was proud of the action taken by the Irish Citizen Army. There was no attempt to repudiate it, and they would allow no one to repudiate it. The Citizen Army was composed of trades unionists having their own governing body with control over their own organisation. The statement in the Committee's report was a statement of fact.<sup>1</sup>

From discussion of the pending proposals for Irish "settlement" Congress did not shrink. The scheme worked out in conference with the Nationalist and Unionist Parties provided for the exclusion of Ulster from the operation of Home Rule, which was to be immediately conceded to the other three provinces. Opposition to Partition was no more likely to divide the ranks of Labour in 1916 than it had been in 1914. Only one voice was raised in defence of the policy of the Parliamentary Party; W. E. Hill, of London, though agreeing that "no more hateful proposal could be made than partition", argued that "when they came down to the hard practical issue they had to face this fact—that if there was to be self-government in Ireland and workers were to have their chance of taking their part in it, it could only be by the agreement of their loyalist fellow-countrymen in the north of Ireland, and that could only be achieved by some measure of partition". But his rhetorical question, "Were the Irish people prepared to go out into the desert again for fifty years", was greeted with cries of "We are! We are!". The delegates heartily supported the reply to Lloyd George of the deputation that had waited upon him in the previous month, that rather than accept the suggested scheme they would continue as before, despite his threat of the continuance of martial law. One Dublin delegate won applause by appealing for the resumption of a militant policy:

Recent events had gone a long way in instilling new life into

<sup>1</sup> 22nd Annual Report, p. 37.

the Irish trades union movement. Although that movement had a broad platform the more strongly it was identified with Nationality the sooner the question would be settled. Men like James Connolly who were prepared to fight and die for their principles were the sort of men they wanted.<sup>1</sup>

"Amidst loud and continued applause" Congress resolved,

That this Congress, representative of the organised workers of the whole of Ireland, desires to reiterate the decision of the last Irish Trades Union Congress in regard to the suggested exclusion of any portion of Ireland from the provisions of the Home Rule Bill. We protest most strongly against the setting up of any barrier which would sunder and divide the people of this country, believing such action not only undemocratic, but suicidal and disastrous to the working-class movement and further, we feel that in regard to the negotiations now in progress with a view to the settlement of the Irish question, the representatives of Labour, as a most important element in the community, must be consulted.<sup>2</sup>

Congress also demanded that all those imprisoned in connection with the Rising "be given a trial without further delay, or released immediately", that they might resume their interrupted function as bread-winners for their wives and children. At the same time Congress demanded better terms in the matter of naval and military war pensions, disregarding the refusal of a solitary delegate "to admit that these men are fighting for my country which is Ireland".<sup>3</sup> Resolutions demanding a separate Irish Exchequer, railway nationalisation and a Railway Minister of Cabinet rank, and the establishment of farm colonies for soldiers after the war, were also adopted by this Congress.

<sup>1</sup> M. O'Flanagan, Dublin Tinsmiths and Sheetmetal Workers

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, N. E. Report, pp. 13-16, and discussion, pp. 37-40

<sup>3</sup> O'Flanagan, *ibid.*, p. 57

The chief stress throughout the succeeding years was to be laid on the building up of organisation—on the piling up of membership and of “balance in hand”, and on the devising of schemes for better coordination of forces. In 1917, at Derry, fifty-nine trade unions and trades councils were represented. Congress claimed to represent 100,000 organised workers<sup>1</sup> Next year, at Waterford, delegates from seventy-six societies attended; the number of workers affiliated had leaped to a quarter of a million<sup>2</sup> By 1921 the number of unions affiliated had shrunk to forty-two, but their membership totalled 196,000; adding the membership of the score of trades councils affiliated, the number of trade unionists represented was over 300,000. Only thirteen of these unions, with an Irish membership totalling only 46,789, had their headquarters in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup>

This diminution in the number of trade unions, accompanied by an increase in the number of trade unionists, was secured, partly by effecting the amalgamation of local unions into general Irish societies, but chiefly by striving for that industrial unionism which Connolly had preached and Larkin had initiated. Such efforts met with considerable resistance in conservative quarters. On Johnson's suggestion, out of deference to the timidity of one of the pioneers of the Irish Congress, there was deleted from a resolution condemning sectional trade unions a clause recommending “that in future admission to membership in Congress be discouraged or refused to all sectional bodies unless they can show they have made efforts during the previous year to carry out the spirit of this resolution”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 23rd Annual Report, I T U C & L P

<sup>2</sup> 24th Annual Report, I L P & T U C

<sup>3</sup> 27th Annual Report, I. L. P. & T. U. C.

<sup>4</sup> 22nd Annual Report, Sligo, 1916

The Syndicalist ideal was brought concretely before the delegates at the Drogheda Congress in 1919. In view of the facts that of the 700,000 adult wage-earners in Ireland, only 250,000 to 300,000 were organised, and that of these again only about 220,000 were affiliated to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress,<sup>1</sup> and particularly in view of the fact that the organised workers were catered to by a multiplicity of overlapping unions, the National Executive submitted a memorandum outlining a scheme of amalgamation<sup>2</sup>

Anxious to advance to the goal of One Big Union, which should wield both the industrial and political forces of Labour, O'Lehane moved on behalf of the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association a resolution instructing the new National Executive to prepare a definite scheme for submission to a Special Congress. The resolution suggested that the National Executive should be given vastly increased power, including the right to call a general strike; all dispute pay was to be provided from national funds controlled by the National Executive, and no strike was to take place without the sanction of that body. The project was resisted by the delegates of several of the larger amalgamateds—notably the Carpenters, Engineers, Railway Clerks, and Railwaymen. Though professing their adherence to the One Big Union ideal, they feared lest they might be called upon to cut the painter that secured them to their cross-Channel Executives and to their reserve funds. Despite their threat to form a separate organisation if Congress should decide for an Irish Union, the resolution was adopted by a vote of 131 to 50<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This body had been reorganised in 1918. *Vide infra*, p. 325

<sup>2</sup> 25th Annual Report, pp. 61-65

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-112.

The work of the sub-committee appointed by the N. E., in compliance with the resolution of Congress, was interrupted by the death of O'Lehane, the prime mover in the matter. Notwithstanding, progress had been made in the direction of forming a Distributive Workers' Union. As the general reluctance to sacrifice "vested interests" gave rise to difficulties about disposition of balances and adjustment of benefit scales, direct amalgamation of the several existing unions of shop workers was not proposed. Instead, the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association, the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, and the Irish Grocers' and Vintners' Association were to combine in a close federation, which was to take over the work of organisation in future. Such members of the Irish Clerical Workers, Irish Transport Workers' Union, and Irish Women Workers' Union as were employed in distributive trades were also to be affiliated, by their respective unions, to the new Federation. The member societies were to pledge themselves not to accept new members or to re-enter lapsed members. Under the direction of the Federation a new union, to be called "The Union of Distributive Workers", was to be brought into existence; all future accessions of membership were to be allocated to this union.

Under the scheme it is intended that the New Union shall continuously expand—first, through the enrolment of distributive workers at present unorganised; and, second, by the transfer from existing Societies of their present membership. Existing Societies shall continue to hold their members for benevolent purposes, and will deal with the smaller questions that arise in connection with industrial grievances, but will transfer their organising activities and larger wage movements to the Federation. Ultimately, when the industry has been thoroughly organised, and the members of the various Unions become convinced by concrete example of the value of unification, it is

expected that complete amalgamation with the new Industrial Union will ensue.<sup>1</sup>

The new union was not formed. However, the Irish members of the National Union of Shop Assistants, on being ballotted, decided to join the Drapers' Assistants'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by amalgamation with an Irish union, ended the Irish branches of an English union. A similar feat was attempted in the engineering trades. Largely by secessions from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, though partly by amalgamation of petty unions, the Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding, and Foundry Trades Union was formed, taking its place at Congress in 1920. The following year it had increased its membership from 1400 to 4500.<sup>3</sup>

Most phenomenal of all was the growth of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. This organisation, which had introduced to Ireland the concept of industrial unionism, was foremost in the efforts to realise the One Big Union ideal. From its origin on the docks the Transport Union had spread its activities into every department of Irish trade and industry. In its ranks there was room for every category of workers, from the white-collar man to the general labourer in the country. At the time of the Rising the Transport Union had ten branches, scattered from Belfast to Killarney, from Sligo to Waterford, and a membership of 5,000. By the autumn of 1917 the number of branches had increased to thirty-two, with 12,000 members. A census of the Union, taken on June 30, 1918, showed a

<sup>1</sup> 26th Annual Report (1920), pp 47-50: Appendix to N. E. Report.

<sup>2</sup> 27th Annual Report (1921), p. 17 and p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> In 1920-21, the Irish Stationary Engine Drivers, the Whitesmiths, and the Brass Finishers' Unions were amalgamated with the I. E. U. In the same year the I. T. & G. W. U. absorbed by amalgamation the Irish Agricultural and General Workers' Union, the Cork Brewery Workers, and the Tipperary Workingmen's Union. *Ibid*, p 17.

membership of 43,788. By the end of that year the Union claimed 67,827 members organised in 210 branches.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the following year the membership reached 100,000, exclusive of those casual labourers who were able to pay dues for only a few months of the year.<sup>2</sup> Its income for the year 1920 was £100,011 12s. 5d.; its reserve fund at the end of the year amounted to £55,538.<sup>3</sup>

Simultaneous with the development of organisation was

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing figures are taken from a recapitulation of Union history prefixed to the Annual Report for 1918, I. T. & G. W. U. The Census of June 30, 1918, showed the following distribution of membership

Transport .. . . .	7,059
Fuel .. . . .	1,694
Food (including 9,634 agricultural workers) . . .	16,888
Industries . . . . .	15,339
Public Services ... ..	2,808
	<hr/>
	43,788

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report for 1919, which contains a detailed "Census of Membership on 31st January, 1920". The main heads show the following distribution of membership.

I. Land, Mines, and Fisheries . . . . .	40,329
II. Food . . . . .	16,063
III. Transport and Communications .. .	15,169
IV. Manufacture ... . .	12,126
V. Construction . . . . .	8,527
VI. Public Services and Miscellaneous . . . . .	10,509
	<hr/>
Total . . . . .	102,823

"These figures represent the totals of membership as inscribed on the rewritten roll books for 1920, and are exclusive of all lapsed members and members in arrears. These latter include about 20,000 farm labourers who are out of employment during the winter months, but have since resumed their membership."

<sup>3</sup> Financial Statement, Annual Report for 1920. The total amount received during the year was £104,088 3s. 6d. "The total assets to credit as shown in the Balance Sheet are £66,202 os. 5d.—a healthy financial position. It was only during this year that the last of the old debts from 1913 period was paid off."



the clarification of social theory. In 1916, despite the mild protests of Johnson and Campbell, Congress instructed the National Executive to "formulate a comprehensive National Labour Programme . . . to be submitted for consideration and approval to the constituent organisations".<sup>1</sup> By a judicious boiling-down of Congress resolutions, the N. E. constructed a patchwork programme which it issued in the form of a manifesto to the workers of Ireland in November, 1916. Urging the fundamental necessity of trade-union organisation as the basis of all other activities, the manifesto called for governmental action to reduce food and fuel prices, to rehouse the urban workers, to provide work for the unemployed, to establish co-operative farm colonies for labourers, to compel the extension of the acreage under cultivation, to nationalise the railways, to establish a national minimum "living wage", to reorganise the primary education system, to grant equal civic rights to all adults, and to meet several minor demands preferred by special sections of the workers—in sum, the manifesto was an extra affirmation of Congress' hardy perennials.<sup>2</sup>

At a Special Congress held in November, 1918, the constitution of the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party was so revised as to give clearer expression to the ideals of the Irish labour movement.<sup>3</sup> Though retaining the unions as the base of the structure, the emphasis was shifted to the political side, as indicated in the change of title to "Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress". Its objects were for the first time officially defined in detail, as follows:

<sup>1</sup> 22nd Annual Report (1916)

<sup>2</sup> This document is printed in the 23rd Annual Report (1917), pp. 51-53.

<sup>3</sup> 24th Annual Report (1918), pp 95-174. Report of a Special Conference held in the Mansion House, Dublin, on Friday and Saturday, November 1st and 2nd, 1918

(a) To recover for the Nation complete possession of all the natural physical sources of wealth of this country.

(b) To win for the workers of Ireland, collectively, the ownership and control of the whole produce of their labour.

(c) To secure the democratic management and control of all industries and services by the whole body of workers, manual and mental, engaged therein, in the interest of the Nation and subject to the supreme authority of the National Government.

(d) To obtain for all adults who give allegiance and service to the Commonwealth, irrespective of sex, race or religious belief, equality of political and social rights and opportunities.

(e) To abolish all powers and privileges, social and political, of institutions or persons, based upon property or ancestry, or not granted or confirmed by the freely expressed will of the Irish people; and to insist that in the making and administering of the laws, in the pursuit of industry and commerce, and in the education of the young, Property must always be subordinate to Humanity, and Private Gain must ever give place to the Welfare of the People.

(f) With the foregoing objects in view, to promote the organisation of the working class industrially, socially and politically, *e. g.*: in Trade Unions, in Co-operative Societies (both of producers and consumers), and in a Political Labour Party.

(g) To secure labour representation on all national and local legislative and administrative bodies.

(h) To co-ordinate the work of the several sections of the working-class movement.

(i) To promote fraternal relations between the workers of Ireland and of other countries through affiliation with the international Labour movement;

(j) To co-operate with that movement in promoting the establishment of democratic machinery for the settlement of disputes between Nations; and in raising the standard of social legislation in all countries to the level of the highest; and

(k) Generally to assist in the efforts of the working-class of all Nations in their struggle for emancipation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Constitution, Article 2

An amendment proposed by the Railway Clerks' Association attempted to overcome the ambiguity of the first paragraph. Arguing that it would be futile to wrest control from English capitalists only to transfer it to Irish capitalists, the mover of the amendment pleaded for a statement approximated to the definition of objects in the constitution of the British Labour Party. Johnson, replying on behalf of the Executive, pointed out that the Irish working class was only half the nation; the other half, the peasant proprietary class, had an equal claim to the possession of the "natural physical sources of wealth"—"the raw materials inherent in the soil, the rocks and rivers". What the working class could and must claim was "the ownership and control of the whole produce of their labour", which could best be administered by "the democratic management and control of all industries and services by the whole body of workers, manual and mental, engaged therein". With only two dissentients, Congress subscribed "to James Connolly and George Russell rather than to Sidney Webb and Arthur Henderson".<sup>1</sup>

In February, 1919, a Special Conference, attended by delegates from over one hundred unions, was held in the Mansion House, Dublin, to consider a national wages and hours movement. It was suggested by the National Executive that a general demand should be made for a working week of 44 hours, a wage of not less than 150 per cent. above pre-war rates—involving a 20 per cent advance over pre-war real wages—, and an absolute national minimum of 50s. per week for all adult workers who, after the 150 per cent increase, would still be in receipt of less than that amount.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, Irish delegates were attending, as the representatives of an independent nation, the international labour

<sup>1</sup> 24th Annual Report, p 137.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 25th Annual Report (Drogheda, 1919), pp 45-49

and socialist conference at Berne. There they signed the minority, or Adler-Longuet, declaration on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as opposed to Parliamentary Democracy, though regretting the imperfections in the document.<sup>1</sup>

Although considerable support for the suggested national wages and hours movement was forthcoming from the affiliated societies,<sup>2</sup> the National Executive, taking account of the "variation in local conditions", and cognisant of the fact that it had no authority to call out a single man, decided to content itself with advising "the Unions to proceed with the wages and hours movements they have in hand wherever possible in unison with the other Unions in the same industry or locality"<sup>3</sup> and with addressing an open letter to the employers of labour and property owners in Ireland, which it was hoped would "have a good effect in educating the public as to the purposes and hopes of the Labour movement". Disclaiming the duty to propound a remedy, the N. E. adjured the legal proprietors and employers "to lift the country out of the economic and social bog into which you have driven it", warning them that "you fail at your peril".<sup>4</sup>

Though by no means abandoning the struggle for increased wages, shorter hours, and better conditions of employment, Irish Labour had come to realise that any ad-

<sup>1</sup>For an account of Irish participation in the Berne and Amsterdam Conferences, see 25th Annual Report, pp 20-41 (N E Report) See also *Ireland at Berne* (Dublin, 1919)

<sup>2</sup>"The country generally supports the principles adopted by the Conference." 25th Annual Report, p 49. But, "Mr Thomas Johnson, Treasurer, said out of 250 circulars sent out asking for information, they got replies from 67 bodies, of which 37 approved without reservation of the programme Some said it was not applicable to their districts because of agreements, others approved with reservations" *Ibid.*, p 69.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p 50.

<sup>4</sup>This manifesto is printed in full in the 1919 Report, pp. 50-55.

vances in that direction "are only a temporary palliative for the evils of poverty, . . . and that the only effective remedy for our present disabilities is the control of industry in the interest of the community by the organised working class".<sup>1</sup> Despite the obstacles to trade-union activity arising from war conditions, more especially after the outbreak of the fighting between the I. R. A. and the Crown forces, Irish Labour continued to urge its radical demands. Those turbulent months from January, 1919, to the Truce in the summer of 1921 did not, to be sure, witness any of those great labour upheavals that had staggered a somnolent Ireland before the War. The political struggle absorbed all the forces of the Nation, and the Labour Party, a large proportion of whose rank and file were actively participating in the fighting, could not hold itself aloof.

Even during the European War the Irish Labour Party had shown increasing inclination to take a determined stand against British authority in Ireland. Fears for Ireland's food supply first aroused Irish Labour to renew that hostility which Connolly had preached. At a Special Conference in Dublin, December, 1916, a resolution was adopted stating that

if immediate steps be not taken by the Government to ensure an adequate supply of food for the people at reasonable prices, the responsibility will undoubtedly be on the Government for any subsequent action which the Unions concerned may be compelled to take in regard to the handling of foodstuffs, which will entitle them to the fullest moral and financial support of the whole community.<sup>2</sup>

A deputation waited on the Chief Secretary to lay before

<sup>1</sup> Resolution moved by T. Foran, seconded by J. J. Hughes, both officials of the Transport Union.

<sup>2</sup> 1917 Report, p. 17.

him Labour's view in the matter; Thomas Foran, President of the Transport Union, informed Mr. Duke that "if the Government did not take action it might come to pass that the transport workers would find it necessary to refuse to handle food supplies for export".<sup>1</sup> Feeling that the Food Control Committee was "only a fake and a fraud", the three labour representatives resigned their membership.<sup>2</sup> A sustained and vigorous agitation for proper price control was undertaken by the National Executive.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile an even greater menace was hanging over the country; the Government was again considering the application of Conscription to Ireland. While uniting with other elements of resistance in the Mansion House Conference, Labour made private contribution to the National cause.<sup>4</sup> An All-Ireland Labour Convention, attended by over 1500 delegates from every part of the country,<sup>5</sup> met in the Round Room of the Mansion House, Dublin, on April 20th, 1918. "Amidst a scene of the greatest enthusiasm", the Convention resolved on a 24-hour general strike,

(1st.) As a demonstration of fealty to the cause of Labour and Ireland; (2nd ) As a sign of their resolve to resist the application of the Conscription Act, and (3rd ) For the purpose of enabling every man and woman to sign the pledge of resistance against Conscription.

Irish Labour, which under Connolly's guidance had set a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>2</sup> 1918 Report, p. 24

<sup>3</sup> For an extended account of the activities of the Irish Labour Party in the matter of Food Control, see 1920 Report, pp. 24-31 (N E Report) and pp. 93-97 (discussion)

<sup>4</sup> For a full account of Labour's resistance to compulsory military service, see N E. statement, 1918 Report, pp. 37-55

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37 "It was the largest and most representative assembly of labour delegates ever held in this country."

stiff pace for the European labour movement, which had been the first to form a Red Guard, was to be the first to carry out, in the midst of the war, a general strike against the more vigorous prosecution of that war. From midnight Tuesday morning to midnight Tuesday night, on the 23rd. of April, 1918, the Irish working class, outside the Belfast area, gave a magnificent display of solidarity.<sup>1</sup> In view of the temper of the Irish people the Government decided not to attempt the application of Conscription.

It is important to note that Irish Labour's reasons for opposing Conscription in Ireland were by no means identical with Sinn Féin's reasons, much less with the reasons of British Labour. Sinn Féin merely opposed conscription of Irishmen by an alien government. The leaders of British Labour "were not influenced by hostility to enforced military service or indifference to the Nation's requirement to successfully prosecute the war". But "the attempt to enforce conscription will mean not merely the shedding of the blood of thousands of Irishmen, and Englishmen and Scotsmen too; but also the maintenance of a huge permanent army of occupation in Ireland". British Labour "remembered that the active co-operation of Ireland is now vital to the maintenance of the full supplies alike of the armies in France and of the British people"<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, "Irish Labour is resolutely against Conscription for any war whether imposed by a British or an Irish or any other authority"; furthermore, "no measure of Home Rule that may be devised will reconcile us to submit to Conscription.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. The newspapers next morning published detailed accounts of the stoppage in even more glowing language than that used by the N. E. in their report to the Waterford Congress.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ireland and Labour. An Appeal to the Government*. This appeal was issued by the Parliamentary Committee of the British Trades Union Congress and by the Executive of the Labour Party jointly. It is printed in the 24th Annual Report (1918), I. L. P. & T. U. C., pp. 44-5.

We refuse to hand ourselves body and soul to any Military Authority whatever and will not be bribed by any Home Rule Act much less by any promise of one.”<sup>1</sup> The principle Irish Labour stated and stood upon was no mere narrow National one; Irish Labour stood for a principle applicable the world over, in self-governing countries as in subject nations:

We call upon all lovers of liberty everywhere to give assistance in this impending struggle on the grounds that the forcible conscription of an unwilling people is a violation of the fundamental principles of democracy; that to sanction it would be to place in the hands of Governments a power which could be used with deadly effect against the progress of the Labour Movement; and which would establish a precedent full of danger for the whole cause of democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Though Lord French's Proclamation, published June 4, 1918, retracted the threat of Conscription, the promise was held out that steps would be taken to facilitate and encourage voluntary enlistment. Against this sinister revival of "economic conscription", the Irish Labour Party set its face steadfastly. The National Executive advised "affiliated Societies, and especially Trades Councils, to take steps to inform Employers that Labour will interpret any action calculated to force men into the Army as 'facilitating the enforcement of the Conscription Act', and therefore a violation of the National Pledge"<sup>3</sup> Aware that "industrial action of an effective kind cannot be legally supported out of Trade Union funds", the Executive nevertheless urged

<sup>1</sup> From circular-letter of April 24, 1918, "To the Organised Workers of England, Scotland and Wales", printed in 1918 Report, pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> Concluding paragraph of resolution adopted at All-Ireland Labour Convention, April 20, 1918. Cf. 1918 Report, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Circular issued by N. E. Cf. 1918 Report, pp. 41-43



members to put up with the necessary hardships, and bring the strongest pressure to bear on any employer who might compile lists of men of military age

The Kerensky Revolution in Russia had been hailed with delight.<sup>1</sup> Though a loyalist delegate thought their action a "disgrace to the Irish Labour Movement",<sup>2</sup> the 1917 Congress sustained, by a vote of 65 to 24, the decision of its Executive to participate in the Stockholm Conference.<sup>3</sup> By a vote of 68 to 24, the National Executive carried its instructions to the delegates appointed to attend the Conference, despite the vehement protest of delegates who, convinced of Germany's guilt, of the necessity of smashing the German war machine, and of the hypocrisy of German Socialists, blushed for shame at Ireland's disloyalty and disgrace: the delegates were to "seek to establish the Irish Labour Party as a distinct unit in the International Labour Movement", and "to co-operate with the delegates of the workers of other nations" in working for the Russian formula of peace without annexations and indemnities, on the basis of self-determination of peoples. One delegate was "glad there are 24 Britishers in the room anyway",<sup>4</sup> but "the announcement of the passing of the resolution was received with loud and prolonged applause, the demonstration being the most enthusiastic that was witnessed during the Congress"<sup>5</sup> The November Revolution did not adversely affect the attitude of Irish Labour toward Russia.

<sup>1</sup> Cf cable to Tcheidze, 1917 Report, p. 30

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Bennett, Dublin, National Sailors and Firemen's Union. *Ibid*, p 42

<sup>3</sup> Owing to a further motion by H T Whitley, Typographical Association, Belfast branch, a second vote (63-26) was necessary to secure approval of the selection of O'Brien and Campbell "to represent this Congress at Stockholm". *Ibid.*, pp 43-44

<sup>4</sup> "And some are of military age too", retorted another delegate.

<sup>5</sup> For the debate, see 1917 Report, pp 45-48

O'Brien and Campbell secured from Litvinoff in London the promise of Russia's full support to Ireland's claims for admission as a Nation to the International<sup>1</sup> In 1918, Congress renewed its adherence to the Russian peace formula.<sup>2</sup>

During the Armistice negotiations, a Special Congress was held in Dublin to consider the revision of its constitution<sup>3</sup> The Congress opened its proceedings by expelling, on the motion of Foran, President of the Transport Union, the delegates representing the National Union of Sailors and Firemen, because of that union's refusal to carry Huysmans and Henderson in ships worked by its members<sup>4</sup> Again on the motion of Thomas Foran the delegates unanimously reaffirmed their demand for a peace on the basis of the Russian formula, adding that,

true to its tradition for liberty, for internationalism, for the fraternity of the working-class of every land and for the Republic of the Workers, Irish Labour utters its vehement protest against the capitalist outlawry of the Soviet Republic of Russia and calls upon the workers under the governments sharing in this crime to compel the evacuation of the occupied territory of the Republic at the same time as it renews its welcome and congratulations to its Russian comrades who for twelve months have exercised that political, social and economic freedom

<sup>1</sup> "He showed himself to be well-informed about Irish affairs, and mentioned that both Lenin and Trotsky were conversant with the writings of James Connolly, whose name, M. Litvinoff stated, was favourably known to the Russian Revolutionary Movement." 1918 Report, pp. 48-49

<sup>2</sup> Resolution proposed by Wm. O'Brien, seconded by Thomas Johnson, "and passed". 1918 Report, p. 59

<sup>3</sup> The report of this Congress is bound with 1918 Report, pp. 95-169

<sup>4</sup> 1918 Report, pp. 95-99. "The Secretary of the Internationale", Foran argued, "asked for deeds and not words, and they in Ireland who were pledged to the International movement ought to respond to the call of the Secretary of the Internationale"

towards which Irish workers in common with their fellows in other lands still strive and aspire.<sup>1</sup>

It was at this special meeting that Congress embodied in its constitution that definitely socialistic programme quoted earlier in this chapter.<sup>2</sup> At the same time provision was made for the affiliation through local Labour Parties of "individual subscribing members".<sup>3</sup> The constitution was so reworded as to permit, under certain safeguards, the representation at Congress of the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Party.<sup>4</sup> The machinery for the selection of Parliamentary candidates was overhauled, with a view to making it more certain that the elected representatives of Labour would be amenable to the authority of the National Executive.<sup>5</sup> Without protest, Standing Orders were modified to admit of a card vote on any resolution involving financial responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

At Berne, in February, 1919, the Irish delegates demanded the recognition of the Easter Week proclamation of the Irish Republic, "and thus threw the Irish Labour and National demands into sharp contrast with the Home Rule under the government of England attitude of British Labour".<sup>7</sup> Ramsay MacDonald's statement to the Commission on Territorial Questions that "for years the British Labour Party had definitely taken the position that it was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland . . ." was by the Irish delegates deemed "very unsatisfactory".<sup>8</sup> At Am-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Article 2, *vide supra*, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Article 6 For discussion see 1918 Report, pp. 139-144.

<sup>4</sup> Article 5 For discussion, see 1918 Report, pp. 145-147 and 151-152.

<sup>5</sup> Article 10

<sup>6</sup> Standing Order 8.

<sup>7</sup> 1919 Report, p. 23

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29 "You will find that in the new Parliament the Labour Party will uphold the old policy of British Labour in favour of the Irish demand."

sterdam the Irish claims were again pressed. On their return to Ireland, Johnson and O'Shannon reported that

we have grown still stronger in our conviction that the Soviet Government of Russia is Ireland's best and most disinterested friend, and that at least so far as justice and principle are concerned the Labour and Socialist Governments are our only hope, and our only friends amongst the Governments.<sup>1</sup>

Labour's oft-reiterated demand for the recognition of Ireland's national independence as a sovereign state did not imply any enthusiasm for Sinn Féin. Nor could the success of Sinn Féin mean more for Labour than that with the assistance of a lesser foe it had conquered a greater; victory would be but the prelude to a death-grapple. At the head of the Sinn Féin organisation stood Eamon de Valera and Arthur Griffith. The latter had changed not a whit since those eventful years when, through the pages of *Sinn Féin* he bade Labour repudiate Socialism and resume its rightful place as the humble servant of the Nation—occasionally to be petted, perhaps, but never to speak until it was spoken to.<sup>2</sup> Eamon de Valera, who, as the sole surviving commandant of Easter Week, had soared to the highest place in the esteem of his countrymen, had imbibed nothing of the ideals of Pearse and Connolly. Long steeped in the abstractions of mathematics, he was an easy prey to the social abstractions of his colleague. In his Mansion House speech, de Valera adopted Griffith's plea—the plea of the political revolutionists of the nineteenth century — “that in a free Ireland, with the social conditions that obtained in Ireland, Labour had a far better chance than it would have in capitalist England”.<sup>3</sup> Apparently 1913 had meant nothing to him

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *supra*, chap. ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Oct. 26, 1917.

Our Labour policy [he continued] is a policy of a free country, and we ask Labour to join with us to free the country. We recognise that we can never free it without Labour. And we say, when Labour frees this country—helps to free it—Labour can look for its own share of its patrimony.

Beyond such tenuous expressions, Sinn Fein had nothing to offer but two resolutions adopted at its Convention on October 25, 1917: one of these affirmed Labour's right to a "fair and reasonable" wage; the other urged Irish workers to sever their connections with British trade unions<sup>1</sup>

Of such bait Irish Labour was duly contemptuous. With the example of France and the United States before them the *Voice of Labour* preferred the British monarchy to a bourgeois Irish Republic; with the experience of William Martin Murphy's adhesion to the principle of a "fair and reasonable" wage, and of his interpretation of that phrase, Irish workers did not intend to burn their fingers for other people's chestnuts, while waiting for a patrimony which might be held in trust by self-constituted executors "We can work for freedom, and we will, but at the same time we'll claim our share of our patrimony when and where opportunity offers"<sup>2</sup>

In September, 1918, the National Executive issued a manifesto to the workers of Ireland, announcing the intention of the Irish Labour Party to contest the approaching general election as an independent political unit. The demand for self-determination and the determination to resist conscription were affirmed anew. Pointing out that "for the worker living year in and year out, even in so-called prosperous times, with the barest margin between his daily work and starvation, it is not enough to know that his elected

<sup>1</sup> The new president restated his doctrine many times Cf. e. g., *Freeman's Journal*, Dec. 10, 1917

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Opinion The Voice of Labour*, Dec. 1, 1917

representatives stand for the freedom of Ireland as a political state", the manifesto held before the eyes of the workers the ultimate aims of Irish Labour as set forth in the definition of objects soon to be included in the constitution of the Labour Party. It was announced that the N. E. had unanimously decided that the members of the Irish Labour Party should not attend at Westminster.<sup>1</sup>

Candidates had been selected and preparations for the contest were well under way when the signs of collapse in Central Europe made it clear that the election would be the "Peace Election", not the "War Election". In the overheated political atmosphere of Ireland, the response to the September Manifesto was not encouraging. Too many of the workers felt that Labour should stand down. On the recommendation of the N. E., the Special Congress of November 1918 decided, by a vote of 96 to 23, to leave the way open for a clear expression by the Irish people of their wholehearted demand for self-determination.<sup>2</sup> It was argued that "they could not be industrially free men so long as they were National slaves". Unwilling to risk the election of "undesirables" if the National vote was split between Labour and Sinn Fein—for in view of the labour candidates' refusal to sign the Sinn Fein pledge, Sinn Fein would not fail to run its own candidates against Labour's nominees—the delegates hoped that they would have a stronger lien on the affections of the Nation for their sacrifice in sinking the issue of the Workers' Republic. The result was the election, in 73 out of Ireland's 105 constituencies, of Sinn Feiners, pledged to the Irish Republic, but not to the Co-operative Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It is conceivable that altered circumstances and the interests of the workers and democracy may however warrant a change of policy which shall be determined by a special National Congress." This manifesto is printed as an appendix to the 1918 Report, pp 165-169.

<sup>2</sup> The debate on election policy occupies pages 102-122 of the 1918 Report.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Constitutional Year Book for 1919*, p. 221.

Throughout the Terror Irish Labour maintained its independent struggle for national independence. In April, 1919, a local general strike broke out in Limerick against the system of military permits. Supported by the sympathy of the general public, and even of the Chamber of Commerce, the struggle was maintained for ten days in the teeth of the British military power. At the end of that time all who could resume work without applying for permits were ordered back to work by the Strike Committee. As £7,000 or £8,000 per week were needed and as, owing to the slowness of the machinery, only £1,500 had actually been received by the end of the second week, the Strike Committee abandoned its protest. Yet within a week after resumption of work the obnoxious order was rescinded by the military authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Pursuant to the recommendation of the Berne Conference, May Day (1919) was observed "as the workers' holiday". Although demonstrations were forbidden in Dublin by the military, practically the whole country, outside the Belfast area, downed tools to demonstrate the solidarity of the workers. At mass meetings throughout the country the workers adopted a resolution reasserting their right to self-determination and demanding substantial improvements in their economic condition. The final paragraph declared "that in economic affairs the object of the Labour Movement must be to win for the workers an ever-increasing share of the produce of their combined labour, until the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1919 Report, pp. 56-58 (N. E. Report). The N. E. were accused of having "let down" the strike, *cf. debate, ibid*, pp. 73-83. A similar contest was waged against the military, from Nov. 1919 to Feb. 1920, over the Military Permits Order; *cf. 1920 Report*, pp. 11-18 (N. E. Report). A sequel to this strike was a bitter wrangle between the Automobile Drivers' Union and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, *cf. debate, ibid*, pp. 81-92.

present system which gives the control of industry to those who live upon rent, interest, and profit, is abolished".<sup>1</sup>

In April, 1920, Irish Labour gave most dramatic and convincing proof alike of its devotion to the National cause and of its own solidarity and power. Over one hundred political prisoners in Mountjoy went on hunger strike on April 5; to appeals for relaxation of their treatment, Lord French had replied that if they chose to die, he would make no effort to prevent their doing so. On April 12, the Resident Committee of the National Executive issued a manifesto calling for a general stoppage of work—certain essential services excepted—until the men were released; the manifesto appeared in the newspapers on the streets of Dublin at noon of that day; its purport was broadcasted over the country by telegraph. The response was immediate and amazing: with the exception of the Belfast area, the morning of the 13th saw Irish trade and industry practically at a standstill. Workers' Committees undertook the organisation of the food supply; many Town Councils turned over the municipal buildings to these committees. By the evening of the second day of the stoppage the authorities had capitulated. The hunger strikers were released and removed to hospitals.<sup>2</sup>

There remains to be recorded one further instance of that peculiar boldness in action that has been so characteristic of the Irish working class since the coming of the "new unionism". Immediately after the refusal of the London dockers to load the "Jolly George", Dublin dockers refused to un-

<sup>1</sup> 1919 Report, p. 44. The newspapers of May 2, 1919, though giving less notice to this demonstration than to the anti-conscription strike in the preceding year, amply confirm the N. E.'s account of the stoppage.

<sup>2</sup> 1920 Report, pp. 34-37. Cf. also daily newspapers; the *Freeman's Journal* was so far moved as to describe the strike as "A Nation's Protest",—an extreme concession by this time-serving paper to Labour's action in behalf of the National cause.



load any military equipment. A few days later the dockers at Dun Laoghaire (late Kingstown) followed their example. When the cargo was discharged by the military, the railwaymen refused to work a train till it had been proved that there was no military equipment on it. The decision of the Executive Committee of the National Union of Railwaymen to instruct its members to refuse to handle any material that was intended to aid Poland in her war with Russia was interpreted by Irish railwaymen to apply equally to Ireland. Members of the N. U. R. employed at the North Wall, Dublin, refused to assist in unloading arms; over four hundred men were dismissed in consequence. The rank and file dispute of dockers and railwaymen threatened to become general. The Executive of the N. U. R. refused assistance, other than sending a deputation to the Prime Minister, who insisted that the Government had "really got to be absolutely adamant." In this crisis the men accepted the lead of the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party. While urging the men to stand firmly to their position, the Executive strongly discountenanced the idea of a general strike of Irish railwaymen. Let the men stay at their jobs, refusing to work trains carrying munitions, and let the Government bear the responsibility for their dismissal; police and soldiers were to be carried, provided they were unarmed. Despite these prudent tactics, by August, 1920, almost 1,500 men had been dismissed. The number was being rapidly augmented, owing to the Government's policy of sending an armed party to board trains as "passengers", on the refusal of the guard or driver to proceed with such luggage aboard, the "passengers" were withdrawn and the train was moved; at the end of the journey the guard or driver, or both, was suspended or dismissed. At the same time the Castle authorities broke up the Labour Party's preparations to organise a motor transport service for the distribution of

essential food supplies, confiscating papers and records, and arresting members of food committees. By autumn, general paralysis of the Irish railways through shortage of engine drivers was imminent. In these circumstances a Special All-Ireland Labour Congress was held in the Mansion House, Dublin, to consider the critical situation. Three hundred forty-one delegates attended. After long and earnest deliberation the meeting resolved, with only two dissentients, for a continuance of the struggle. As in the Dail debate on the Treaty, the women members proved the most resolute, urging that even if half the people of Ireland were to starve, yet England would "feel the hunger pinch". A month later, however, the National Executive, taking into account the material hopelessness of the struggle and the proclamation of martial law—to say nothing of the intensification of the Terror as evidenced by the partial destruction of Cork city—, "decided to advise the Railway and Dock Workers to alter the position, and to offer to carry everything that the British Authorities are willing to risk on the trains". Thus closed a seven months' resistance to the military power of the British Government—a resistance in which Irish workers had given a splendid example of determined effort, alike to their fellow-Irishmen and to their fellow-workers in other countries<sup>1</sup>

While contesting municipal and local government elections, in which Labour had marked success,<sup>2</sup> the Irish Labour Party refused to participate in the Parliamentary elections under the "Partition of Ireland Act" of 1920 "beyond calling upon all workers North and South to demonstrate

<sup>1</sup> 1920 Report, pp. 41-46 (N. E. Report) and pp. 114-118 (discussion); 1921 Report, pp. 6-13 (N. E. Report), pp. 49-63 (Report of Special Conference at the Mansion House, Dublin, Nov. 16, 1920), and pp. 86-90 (discussion). Cf. also daily papers and chap. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> 1920 Report, pp. 4-6 (N. E. Report) and pp. 75-78 (discussion).

their loyalty to Ireland and freedom by voting only for those candidates who stand for the ownership and government of Ireland by the people of Ireland".<sup>1</sup> In consequence, Labour had no part in the London negotiations that eventuated in the "Articles of Agreement" of December, 1921. Nor was Labour under the necessity of expressing itself officially on the question of acceptance or rejection of the Treaty. While Jim Larkin cabled from America to express his satisfaction that no representative of Irish Labour had shared in the betrayal of the Irish Republic by the five plenipotentiaries, the *Voice of Labour* in Dublin complimented the Labour Party on the tactical strength of its position.<sup>2</sup> Amid the ominous rumblings that portended months of desperate civil strife, the Irish Free State came into being, while Irish Labour ostentatiously paraded its neutrality.

<sup>1</sup> 1921 Report, pp 17-19 (N. E. Report) and pp 110-115 (discussion).

<sup>2</sup> *Voice of Labour*, Jan. 7, 1922. "Out of upwards of one thousand branches and councils of Unions not more than six were foolish enough and lacking enough in class-consciousness to indulge in resolution passing. These six, representing less than 5,000 workers, declared for the Treaty"

## CHAPTER XII

### BELFAST

"THERE were two things men were willing to fight and die for, religion and politics—a religion they had not got and politics they did not understand"<sup>1</sup> Belfast regards itself as a Christian democracy In point of fact, Belfast, a by-product of the Industrial Revolution, is the very incarnation of capitalist industrialism in its most nakedly brutal form

"Prior to the seventeenth century comparatively little is known of Belfast, it has no storied past rich in historic associations But, from the corporate birth of the town on 27th April, 1613, the date of the first charter, the little cluster of houses in the neighbourhood of the ancient ford steadily increased in number, and the precincts of the Castle are now the centre of the activities of a vigorous race During the three centuries that have elapsed Belfast has grown from a mere village with five streets and five lanes, 150 houses and under 600 inhabitants, to a city containing 3,500 streets and 80,000 houses, apart from business premises, while the population now exceeds 400,000"<sup>2</sup> In 1812 Belfast was not of significance enough to receive mention, as did Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Londonderry, in the newest compendious geography. In 1920 Belfast

<sup>1</sup> Flanagan, Belfast organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union; in Report of 22nd Annual Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, 1916

<sup>2</sup> Cf *The Belfast and Province of Ulster Directory*, published by the *Belfast News Letter* (Belfast, 1919), p. 3

could assert "its present proud position as the commercial capital of Ireland and one of the principal industrial centres of the United Kingdom. Belfast can boast of possessing some of the largest industrial establishments of their kind in the world. Its linen goes to every civilised country in the universe, the ships built in the harbour are known in every clime and to all peoples; the ropes made at Conns-water are favourably known in both hemispheres, and locally manufactured tobacco appeals to all lovers of the fragrant weed" <sup>1</sup>

This stress on the industrial and commercial prosperity of Belfast, and the fact that Belfast has not even a cathedral, are by no means to be taken as implying that Belfast is a grossly materialist community. Nothing could be farther removed from the truth than to conceive of this home of "a vigorous race" as interested in the concerns of this earth to the exclusion of things of the spirit. No subject is capable of arousing more vigour than the barest mention of the Spiritual Father at Rome. The population of Belfast are immensely interested in the existence of Hell, and are proud of their intimate acquaintance with its workings. Leaving open the question whether or not there are any Christians in Belfast, one cannot say of twentieth-century Belfast what was said of Ireland a century ago, viz., that the fledgling priests at Maynooth "commit to memory a portion of the New Testament every week. But the education of the common people is miserably neglected" <sup>2</sup>. Not a Sunday afternoon, however inclement the weather, but what at least half a dozen speakers, from Socialists and Labour candidates

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>2</sup> *A New System of Modern Geography*, by Elijah Parish, D.D. (Newburyport, 1812), p. 199. "The common people live in wretched hovels of mud, their diet is chiefly potatoes and buttermilk, their favorite drink is spiritous liquor, distilled from corn, which they call the water of life, but is really the water of death. . . The gentlemen of Ireland are as large as the English" P. 200

to vendors of patent medicines and members of the Belfast Protestant Association, remind their audiences at the Custom House steps of the doings of Moses and Abraham, of Jeremiah and Job, of Hezekiah and Solomon, and of divers other proponents of Christian standards of conduct<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that the Old Testament, not the teachings of Christ, provide the solid foundation for the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth spirit that is accepted as a substitute for religion, not only among the Protestant majority, but among the Catholic minority as well.

But if Belfast has nothing recognisable as religion, politics it unquestionably has. Though to the rulers of the six-county area those politics may be crystal clear, to the men who are "willing to fight and die for them", Unionist politics assume grotesque forms. Loyalty is the boast of Belfast, but it is a loyalty expressed in words and actions of incomparably insolent disloyalty. When loyalty to the British Crown has to be demonstrated by firing on bodies of troops in His Majesty's uniform, when loyalty to the flag takes the form of rallying under the Union Jack to attack a church that is under the protection of the Union Jack, it is obvious that there is some mental confusion somewhere. It may be pardonable to believe that William of Orange was the archenemy of the Papacy, but to shoot soldiers of the Norfolk regiment because the Duke of Norfolk is a Catholic verges on the ridiculous. Men may perhaps be excused for pursuing a policy of "Sinn Fein" while fulminating against "Sinn Femers", but to think that Mr. Gladstone was a pope is not the most convincing proof of a clear grasp of politics or history.

In Belfast, then, two negative forces of overwhelming

<sup>1</sup> Not only dead Jews but live Jews are classed as Christians in Belfast, where they are assigned to the category of "papists", if they are in the trade-union movement, or to the category of "prods", if they keep shop.

power have to be reckoned with—religion and politics. The great majority of Belfast's population are Protestant and Unionist (the adjectives are all but synonymous); violent hatred of "papists" is the root of their Protestantism, violent hatred of Nationalists their guide in politics. The minority are Catholic and Nationalist; ever on the defensive, their outlook is as narrow and sterile as that of their enemies. In such circumstances the labour movement has been the work of a handful who make little pretence to religion and who have been of relatively little account in politics.

Time and time again have the seeds of a vigorous labour movement been sown in Belfast, only to see the first buds blighted by the injection of political virus. In the first half of the nineteenth century trade unionism seems to have made comparatively slight headway in the North<sup>1</sup> Three factors were then operative against the growth of trade unions. On the one hand, the early trade unions were mainly combinations of skilled artisans; the newly sprouted urban community on the banks of the Lagan had not the same body of craftsmen that flourished in older centres such as Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, and Derry. There was then no basis in Belfast for craft unions. On the other hand, the industries of Belfast were carried on mainly under the domestic system. Among scattered handloom operators there could not rise those powerful, compact organisations that developed with the factory system. Furthermore, the employers in Belfast have never suffered their divergent ecclesiastical and political views to influence them in their dealings with their workers, however much they might foster divergence of opinion among the workers themselves. Reference has already been made to Mr. Finlay,<sup>2</sup> who felt

<sup>1</sup> Scant mention is made of Belfast in eighteenth-century legislation against combinations

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. supra*, chapter III, p. 93

so strongly on politics, but felt still more strongly that the operative printers must be kept in the station to which God had called them

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, trade unionism had become firmly established in Belfast, largely through the medium of British trade unions. At the close of the century the bulk of the organised workers in Belfast were members of amalgamated unions. Certain of the building trades, namely, bricklayers, plasterers, and painters, a few trades connected with the preparation or distribution of food, as butchers, bakers, and coopers, a handful of metal workers and enginemen, municipal employees, upholsterers, hairdressers, and, of course, workers in the linen industries were organised in local trade unions. In all, some 25 trade unions, with a total membership of about 8,000, retained their local independence in 1899<sup>1</sup>. But the shipwrights and most of the metal trades, workers in wood and leather, printers, tailors, and others had joined cross-Channel unions.

Though Belfast continued to send delegates to British Trades Union Congresses the organised workers of Belfast were from the first active in the Irish Trades Union Congress. Not only local Belfast societies but Belfast branches of amalgamated unions regularly sent delegates to the infant Congress. The chairman of the Parliamentary Committee elected by the first Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, held at Dublin in 1894, was a Belfast printer, Hugh McManus. On subsequent Parliamentary Committees and in the work of the Annual Congresses Belfast delegates

<sup>1</sup> Of these, 9 unions with a membership of 5,000 are accounted for by the linen industry. In 1899, 57 unions, with a membership of 19,000, were represented on the Belfast trades council. These figures are compiled from the Report by the Chief Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions in 1899 *Accounts and Papers*, 1900, vol. 37, [Cd 422] *Parliamentary Papers*, 1900, vol. lxxxiii, pp. 601 *et seq.*



played a prominent role, out of all proportion to their numerical strength. Again, in the early years of the Irish Congress, when it was dependent on the voluntary contributions of its component organisations, Belfast unions were the most generous supporters, giving regularly more than double, sometimes treble, what their Dublin brethren supplied

In the first decade of the twentieth century Belfast, more closely in touch with developments in the labour world beyond the Irish Sea, took the lead in other ways as well. Though Connolly's pioneer work had been done in Dublin, Belfast was the chief centre of Socialist thought in Ireland. As early as 1884 Henry George had been brought to Belfast by the Rev. Bruce Wallace to speak under the auspices of the Liberal Association. So much enthusiasm was aroused by this visit and by a debate, held in the Ulster Hall, between Rev. Hugh Hanna and Rev. Bruce Wallace that the Trades Council was induced to endorse the candidature, at the general election of 1885, of a prominent trade-unionist flax dresser.<sup>1</sup> Though the candidate of the Trades Council, running as a Liberal, was heavily defeated by a Conservative in North Belfast, he polled almost double the number of votes cast for a Parnellite candidate in the same constituency at the general election of the following year.<sup>2</sup>

In 1893 the British Trades Union Congress met in Belfast. It left behind it a branch of the Independent Labour Party. For three or four years propaganda meetings were held every Sunday at the Custom House steps. The withdrawal of police protection at these meetings practically

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Bowman, later prominent in both the Irish and the British Trades Union Congresses

<sup>2</sup> 1885 W. Ewart	(C) 3,915	1886 Sir W. Ewart	(C) 4,522
A. Bowman	(L) 1,330	J. Dempsey	(N) 732

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2,585

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3,790

*Cf The Constitutional Year Book for 1911, p. 213.*

terminated the branch's activity. Nevertheless, as the Belfast Socialist Party, the handful of propagandists lived on. With the assistance of the Trades Council the Socialists availed themselves of the extension to Ireland, in 1898, of the Local Government Act to contest elections to the Poor Law Board and Corporation. William Walker, leading light in the local Socialist group, was elected a Poor Law Guardian; Walker and six others won seats in the Corporation.<sup>1</sup>

In 1904 Walker presided over the Eleventh Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, at Kilkenny. His presidential address was a plea for unity in the political field as in the industrial.

The Trade Union movement is the most powerful working-class movement of to-day; its membership numbers almost two millions; its funds stand at almost four million pounds, and it has an electoral power that can make or unmake parties. This membership has hitherto been divided, one section voting with one party, and the other section with another, thus each section neutralising each other's power; its funds have been spent on strike after strike which has arisen not always because of the desire of the employers not to concede terms, but often against economic conditions which can only be changed by Parliamentary action. If then we can establish a movement which can not merely unite these two million voters but which will also have the support of the huge army of workers not organised but receiving the benefits which trades combinations confer upon the working classes, then we shall be directing a power and instituting a movement that shall eliminate all iniquities and substitute cooperation in lieu of the competitive waste now prevailing. To do this, of course, means money. But surely Trades' Union funds can be devoted to nothing better than the improving the social conditions of the members. Surely it is a saner

<sup>1</sup> Most of them were unseated at the next election three years later.

and wiser policy to spend £1000 in the return of a member to the House of Commons than it is to spend ten times that amount in a strike which is often not successful, and even if successful entails upon the members participating in such strike great privations<sup>1</sup>

The president's address roused Congress to serious consideration of the usual resolution, moved and seconded by Belfast delegates that Congress "heartily recommends to the Trades Unions of this Country an immediate affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee to promote the formation of independent labour representation in Ireland". Despite the energetic defence of the Nationalist Party by a minority of Dublin delegates, the resolution was, as usual, carried.<sup>2</sup>

The Belfast Trades Council, dominated by the remnant of the Belfast Socialist Party, was not slow to act on its own recommendations. In 1905 the Belfast Labour Party came into being, nominally independent of the Trades Council, actually controlled by an interlocking directorate. Backed by the infant Labour Party and supported by his own trade union (Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners), Walker contested a bye-election in North Belfast that same year. This constituency was the one contested in 1885, on the Liberal ticket, by a trade unionist endorsed by the Trades Council. Since that date it had been a life incumbency for a succession of Conservative baronets, whose return was rarely even opposed. The heir apparent in 1905 was Sir Daniel Dixon, Bart., a well-known Lord Mayor. Sir Daniel was elected, but by a majority of less than 500 in a total poll of 8,400.<sup>3</sup> Before he could take his seat the

<sup>1</sup> Report of 11th Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, Kilkenny, 1904.

<sup>2</sup> By 41 to 14, *ibid*, p. 57

<sup>3</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir D. Dixon, Bt.  
Wm. Walker

C. 4,440  
Lab. 3,966 Cf. *The Constitutional Year*  
Book for 1911, p. 213.

general election of 1906 supervened and the struggle was renewed. In this contest the Labour candidate all but duplicated Devlin's feat in West Belfast. While that apostle of Nationalism broke the Conservative monopoly of Belfast seats at Westminster by carrying that division, he was elected by a plurality of only 16 votes, out of a total of 8,300 cast.<sup>1</sup> In North Belfast, Walker was defeated by only 291 votes in a poll of 9,500.<sup>2</sup>

A year later the death of Sir Daniel Dixon gave Walker a last opportunity. Tricked by the Protestant Association into answering a set of leading questions as to his ecclesiastico-political opinions, Walker lost to (Sir) George Clark by almost 2,000 out of a total of over 10,000 ballots cast.<sup>3</sup> Undaunted by this reverse, Labour once more contested North Belfast in the general election of 1910. As its former champion had in the interval accepted a government post, another prominent trade unionist was selected. It was his fate to meet somewhat more decisive defeat, polling less than forty per cent of the votes cast.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J Devlin	N	4,138	
Capt J R Smiley	L U	4,122	
(Rt Hn) J. A. M. Carlisle	L U	153	
	Plurality	16	<i>Ibid</i>
<sup>2</sup> Rt Hn Sir D Dixon, Bt	C	4,907	
Wm. Walker	Lab	4,616	
		291	<i>Ibid</i>
<sup>3</sup> G S Clark	C	6,021	
Wm Walker	Lab	4,194	
		1,827	<i>Ibid</i>
<sup>4</sup> R Thompson	C	6,275	
R. Gageby	Lab	3,951	
		2,324	<i>Ibid.</i>

Nowhere else in Ireland had Labour progressed so far as even to nominate candidates for Parliament. In the field of political action, as in the work of the Irish Trades Union Congress, Belfast was in the van of the Irish labour movement in this first decade of the twentieth century. Finally, it was in Belfast that the "new unionism" first appeared on Irish soil. The story of the dockers' and carters' strikes in 1907 need not be retold here. Suffice it to recall that the new spirit and new methods introduced by Larkin were destined to capture the whole Irish labour movement and, coupled with the labour philosophy worked out by Connolly, to make Ireland for a few years the cynosure of all labouring eyes.

Yet Belfast was far from being a workers' paradise. The new dockers' organisation had not survived its organiser's departure. In the summer of 1911 Connolly was sent to Belfast by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. He found the position well-nigh hopeless and the men dispirited by constant victimisation.

The day's labour was unlimited. It began often before the nominal starting-time and continued after the nominal knocking-off. Half the meal hour was worked in most cases and seldom was a full day's wage paid, no matter how hardily earned. The day's wage was fixed at 5/- but through stoppages and pretexts of various kinds few were the men who received five shillings even for eleven and twelve hours' work. . . . The man who objected to this "jibbing" was given several weeks' rest without pay or chance of employment<sup>1</sup>

In the grain trade "gom" of 6*d.* extra was given to men working in gangs whose output had exceeded fifteen hundred 200-lb. bags in a day.

To be sure, Belfast's pride lies not in her docks, but in her shipyards and linen mills. From these monuments of

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, June 12, 1915

prosperity the Orange worker has repeatedly sought to drive the hated Catholic Nationalist. Here, then, one might expect to find conditions of employment favourable in proportion to the workers' pride.

The clang of the ambulance bell is one of the most familiar daily sounds on the streets between our shipyards and our hospitals. It has been computed that some seventeen lives were lost on the Titanic before she left the Lagan; a list of the maimed and hurt and of those suffering from minor injuries, as a result of the accidents at any one of those big ships would read like a roster of the wounded after a battle upon the Indian frontier. The public reads and passes on, but fails to comprehend the totality of suffering involved. But it all means lives ruined, fair prospects blighted, homes devastated, crippled wrecks of manhood upon the streets or widows and orphans to eat the bread of poverty and pauperism<sup>1</sup>

Conditions in the linen industry in Belfast, to which attention had been called by the annual reports of the medical superintendent officer of health of Belfast, were made the subject of a Government Inquiry in 1911. Particular attention was given to out-work, which was described as being, "on the whole, indispensable", as "the existing accommodation at the factories would be wholly insufficient to receive" the existing out-workers; if these women should, by the curtailment of out-working, be deprived of their employment, either the men (working for the most part in other industries) must get better wages or "the people could not exist". The former alternative was not deemed worthy of serious consideration as a possibility. "Moreover, certain processes are, and always have been, carried on exclusively as home industries" To convert them into factory industries "would involve nothing short of a revolu-

<sup>1</sup> James Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, p. 284.

tion in the trade. Further, the evidence shows that out-workers furnish the employers with a supply of labour, on which, in times of pressure, he can make demands unrestricted by the Factory Acts; whilst in times of slackness he can turn them off without incurring the standing charges involved in the case of factory workers." The Committee of Inquiry "consider, therefore, that so long as present conditions prevail, out-work must be accepted as part of the machinery of production in the making-up trades of the North of Ireland, and that any measures which resulted in a considerable reduction in the amount of work given out would entail serious suffering on the out-workers".

The "present conditions", as soberly set forth in the Committee's Report, deserve some attention. The "Rates of Payment said to be earned per hour by Belfast Out-workers" in seven processes, all but one of which "demand a measure of skill", while two "are highly skilled industries", were carefully tabulated from the evidence of two officials of the Belfast Corporation and of one trade-union official. Of the 531 cases investigated, two are recorded as "between 5*d.* and 6*d.*" per hour; eleven in all are recorded as over 3*d.* per hour. Of the remaining 520 cases, 98 are given as not less than 2*d.* and not more than 3*d.* an hour, and 422 as under 2*d.* an hour. In 168 of the cases tabulated, the out-worker was found to be earning less than one penny an hour.

In considering these tables it should be noted that those cases have been omitted—

- (1) in which the worker was referred to as being aged, infirm, or inexperienced;
- (2) in which mention was made of any other circumstances unfavourable to a normal rate of earnings; or
- (3) in which the actual rate earned per hour was not clearly stated.

All other cases, including those showing high rates of pay, are included in the summary.

As the "employers who gave evidence contended for the most part that the rates per hour mentioned in the" investigated cases "were, on the whole, lower than those which are normally earned by a worker of average efficiency, and that many instances of low payment would be accounted for by the fact that the worker whom the witness visited was below the general standard", the Committee "arranged with some of the Belfast employers for workers chosen by them to carry out, in our presence, work identical with that referred to" in the tables cited above.

In order to appreciate the full significance of these cases it is necessary to bear in mind that they were selected haphazard, and that the tests were conducted under conditions arranged by the employers themselves, with workers chosen by them, who were evidently skilled, and some of whom worked at a speed which they would not have been able to maintain during their ordinary employment. Even in these circumstances, however, the rates per hour will be seen to fall conspicuously below those which the employers had mentioned to us as being, in their opinion, within the earning power of fair average workers, and in fact most of them come within the lower ranges of the rates given above in the Tables of investigated cases.

This evidence as to the earning power of out-workers is not the whole story. From these earnings must be subtracted fines and deductions for damaged work and deductions for material supplied by the employer; payment was frequently made in goods, often arbitrarily valued by the shopkeepers employed as paymasters by the linen firms. The Committee expressed its satisfaction with the hygienic conditions of factories and out-workers' homes; its test seems to have been no more rigorous than to establish that these places were "sufficiently cleanly to admit of the work being done in them without contamination". Incidentally the Committee noted, as a "painful feature", the extent



of child employment. Deprecating "the parents' improvidence", the Committee reported that "the fact remains that we have an abundance of evidence that young children are often kept working for long hours—even until very late at night—and that the time which they should be spending in play or sleep is seriously curtailed".

It is obvious that these conditions—conditions which "the employers have no desire to defend", but whose existence in their own businesses they refused to admit—necessarily reacted on the conditions of employment of the in-workers. So prevalent, indeed, did the Committee find sweating to be among the out-workers, that it was pleased to express its satisfaction with the wages of the girls employed in factories. Commenting on "the opinions expressed by representative Belfast employers", the Committee remarked that "if these opinions had been acted upon throughout the trade, there would have been no need for this Inquiry". But how unnecessary the investigation would have been is thrown into strong relief by the evidence of the employers as to the wages paid in their factories. For instance, one of the employers specifically mentioned by the Committee in connection with the last-quoted comment handed in a signed statement that the workers in his own factory made 15s. a week if they were under 18; "we have girls entering at our place at about 14, as soon as the law allows them, and they are started at 5s a week, and as soon as they can make more by going on their own time they do"<sup>1</sup> This gentleman was unable to "credit" the "evidence which showed that some people are only getting 1d. and 1½d. an hour" for their work.<sup>2</sup> "If I were giving out work on

<sup>1</sup> "I do not say that anything below [9s.] would be a sweated wage, but certainly it would be a very poor job"

<sup>2</sup> "The woman who works for a sweated wage must be useless or else a fool"

which a woman could only make 1d an hour," he exclaimed, "I would go out of the business I would not have anything to do with it." But, "of course if you fix a minimum wage, and fix it high enough, it means that a lot of the workers will be left to starve".<sup>1</sup>

Without going beyond the dry bones of this official report, without any attempt at estimating the totality of human misery implicit in these figures, it must be obvious that the pride of Belfast obscures a truly sorry spectacle. Whether or not one agrees with the members of the Committee of Inquiry in their affirmation that they were "satisfied that the employers, as a body, are anxious that out-workers should receive a fair wage, and that any cause for reproach against the trade in this respect should be removed", it cannot be denied that the vaunted prosperity of Belfast rests on the existence of very evil conditions—conditions, indeed, in no way peculiar to Belfast, but conditions that shed no uncertain light on the meaning of the following excerpt from a recent account of "the Linen Trade of Ulster".

Workers and employers in Ulster understand each other, and each other's difficulties. In business as in politics they stand shoulder to shoulder. When sail had to be shortened to meet the commercial cyclone which has strewn the markets of the world with wrecks, it was done by friendly agreement as to reduced hours and wages, and without the accompaniment of strikes, too common elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Committee of Inquiry into the Conditions of Employment in the Linen and other Making-up Trades of the North of Ireland *Report and Evidence*, 1912 (Cd 6509) Reports from Commissioners, Inspectors, and others, vol 25 *Parliamentary Papers*, vol xxxiv, pp 365-584

<sup>2</sup> *Ulster's Claim on Britain* Lest anyone have doubts as to the beneficent effects of the fact that "Its invested capital in the Linen Industry alone amounts to over £20,000,000", let it be remembered that, "as a distinguished Field-Marshal has said, 'the War was won on wings of Ulster linen'"; Ulster "supplied 95% of all the Aeroplane Cloth used by the Allies".

James Connolly, out of his years of experience both in Belfast and in Dublin, arrived at the conclusion that "from a municipal point of view Belfast is a distinct improvement upon Dublin . . . The homes of the poor are better, house rent is lower, and the city is cleaner and healthier than Dublin" He added that the superior wealth of the municipal area of Belfast, "apart altogether from its greater manufactures", by leaving "a much larger sum available for municipal activities and progress generally", made it possible better to enforce sanitary legislation Yet Connolly did not minimise the fact that "in these industrial parts of the North of Ireland the yoke of capitalism lies heavy upon the lives of the people".<sup>1</sup> Just how heavily is suggested by the concluding paragraph of the Report of H. M. Superintending Inspector for the Northern Division (Scotland and Ulster), appended to the Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops for the Year 1909.<sup>2</sup>

Under the heading "Prosecutions", Inspector Graves reported:

352 cases were taken compared with 235 in 1908, a substantial increase in all districts. Fair penalties have been inflicted on the whole, except in Dundee and in the North of Ireland, where such contraventions as employing females until 11 p. m., and using a steam boiler in such an unsafe condition that it eventually blew up, are met with a fine of one penny.

Failure to enforce the provisions of the several Factories and Workshops Acts was one of the chief grievances annually ventilated at the Irish Trades Union Congress; the remedy urged by Congress was the allocation to Ireland of an adequate force of inspectors. The value of this panacea

<sup>1</sup> Connolly, *The Re-conquest of Ireland*, chap v, "Belfast and its Problems", in *Labour in Ireland*, pp. 274-288.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1910, XXVIII: Cd 5191.

is, in the light of the aforementioned Report, questionable. For example, Inspector Graves reported in February, 1910, that "out of 1,917 thermometer readings of which note was kept", the lowest, 38°, was recorded in a linen lapping room in Belfast; the highest temperature met with was 106°, in a yarn dressing room in Belfast. Mr Graves comments:

The difficulties we have to overcome are exemplified in a prosecution taken in Belfast against a firm of flax manufacturers who, though previously warned, allowed the temperature in the works to fall 12° below the minimum fixed by the Regulations. The Bench (including the Resident Magistrate) inflicted a penalty of 1s. and 1s. 6d costs for what they classed as a technical offence; and expressed their disapproval of the prosecution. Such procedure is rather an encouragement to manufacturers to break the law, and a great obstacle to its efficient administration.

Again, under the heading "Truck", Mr Graves reported:

Mr McCaghey (Belfast) again alludes to this matter at length, and says that the payment of wages in kind shows no signs of diminution. He gives several instances of gross hardships which came before him. A dressmaker worked for 3½ years, during which she only received £26 in cash and £31 worth of goods out of £95 owing, and could obtain no settlement. The employer was prosecuted and fined. Another woman was paid a bag of flour for 2½ weeks work. He says a common practice is to overcharge stitchers for thread. He discovered one case where the employer charged 57s a gross for what cost him 42s. Legal proceedings were also taken in this case. In both cases the magistrates expressed regret at having to inflict the minimum penalty of £5.

Under cover of the reluctance of the Belfast judiciary to inflict the legally prescribed punishment on employers caught redhanded in violations of Westminster labour legislation,

and also in virtue of the scanty staff of inspectors assigned to Ireland, the employers of Belfast have been consistently guilty of gross abuse of their economic power over their workers. It remains to analyse the methods by which these masters have staved off that combination of Protestant and Catholic workers which, if effected, must have forced them to concede, in fact as in name, whatever workers elsewhere have wrung from their employers.

It has been notoriously difficult to weld Catholic and Protestant workers into the same trade union. Only the presence of the British Trades Union Congress in 1893 made it possible to hold a joint demonstration, in which both Catholic and Protestant bands participated—a demonstration whose beauty was somewhat marred by attacks by Orangemen on John Burns and other open-air speakers. The year 1886 was still too fresh in men's minds to absolve Englishmen from suspicion as papists. The temporary union of hearts in 1893 was all but duplicated in 1907, under circumstances already detailed. These two instances of the momentary ascendancy of labour philosophy were due to the enthusiasm aroused, in 1893 by the sessions of the British Congress, in 1907 by the leadership of Jim Larkin. Against them must be set the long series of riotous years stretching from the refulgent outburst of 1886 to the "Castledawson pogrom" of 1912. In this last year the attempt of the Irish Parliamentary Party to collect blood-money for its share in the virtual murder of the House of Lords provoked exceedingly virulent manifestations of sectarian political economy.

The violent passions attendant on the reverberations of "loyalty" among the workers of Ulster must be passed over here. The war not alone lulled into quiescence the efforts of Socialists to make headway among the workers of the North, but equally hushed the fiery patriotism of

Orange workers    Employment was good and wages mounted steadily. So great was the demand for labour that no exception was taken to the indiscriminate employment by shipbuilders and linen merchants of Catholics and Protestants alike. As usual, good times quieted politico-sectarian discord. Curiously enough, the war, which was ultimately to prove the rock on which the nascent labour movement was to split, effected a temporary unification of the hostile factions. To be sure, the North did not participate in those striking manifestations of energy displayed by the Irish labour movement in the war years. On the other hand, the most vigorous post-armistice demands of labour were preferred and pushed in Belfast. While the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress had under consideration proposals for a national wages and hours movement, a rank and file strike for a 44-hour working week broke out in the Belfast shipyards, spreading rapidly among other sections of labour in the city.<sup>1</sup> This strike of February, 1919, far from provoking clashes between Protestants and Catholics, went far to cement them in the bonds of common interest. Though the majority of the workers were Protestants, the chairman of the Strike Committee was a Roman Catholic. After several weeks, however, the strike broke down, the shipbuilders accepting a "national" (i.e., a Kingdom-wide) settlement.

The seeming solidarity of the working class was not long to survive the disappearance of the conditions that had made its development possible. "In the War, 75,000 Ulstermen voluntarily enlisted. In addition many thousands were prevented from enlisting owing to urgent War work".<sup>2</sup> Peace conditions deprived all these thousands of their em-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Report of the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (Drogheda, 1919), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ulster's Claim on Britain*, "Ulster's Proud Record".

ployment, a loss not to be made good elsewhere. "Since the war the linen trade of Ulster has had to bear its share of the depression which has weighed upon the trade and commerce all over the world"<sup>1</sup> Shipbuilding was equally hard hit. The falling-off of the demand for labour permitted the employers to become again interested in the political and religious opinions of their employees. Normally, "workers and employers in Ulster understand each other, and each other's difficulties" In 1920 the employers felt very sorry for their cherished employees, working side by side with Catholics and Sinn Feiners—not only working side by side with them, but standing shoulder to shoulder with them in pressing for betterment of their economic condition, forgetting that Ulster has "to struggle for her existence not only materially but socially and spiritually".

"To the old faith—the Puritan faith—that has made England and Scotland what they are, Ulster has clung like the ivy to the vine, and to-day no community in Christendom is more devoted, or a more consistent exponent of the principles and the philosophy of those Empire builders of centuries now past whose ideas prevail to-day in the greatest and most vigorous populations in both hemispheres"<sup>2</sup> Whether or no the "Empire builders" of Ulster intend to hold themselves up to a gaping world as the most consistent living exponents of the practices of Hawkins and Drake, of the renowned slavetraders and freebooters of centuries now past, it is certain that their interest in the workers' struggle for existence "materially" was confined to contesting wage increases. In this effort they met with but scant success. Thus, in November, 1919, the Interim Court of Arbitration awarded an advance of 5s a week to the Federation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades and the Workers'

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, "Our Linen Industry".

<sup>2</sup> *Ulster's Claim on Britain*, "Ulster and the Empire".

Union against Harland and Wolff, Ltd, Workman, Clark and Co, Ltd, and others and a similar increase to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers against these two great ship-building firms<sup>1</sup> Corresponding awards were being made by single arbitrators. By December, 1920, wages of ship-builders in Belfast ranged from 83s. 3d. to 87s 10d. for a 47-hour working week<sup>2</sup> Such wages were out of all proportion to the "state of the labour market"—in other words, the solidarity of the men's organisations was enabling them to hold their own. Only the revival of sectarian discord could hold out any hope of a return to normalcy.

"Guided by this faith, her glorious heritage in the past, Ulster has pursued a path of progress and development unexcelled by any community of the same size"<sup>3</sup> On July 12, 1920, Sir Edward Carson spoke at the usual Orange celebration.<sup>4</sup> His speech was delivered in the midst of the Terror<sup>5</sup> In Derry, a Conciliation Committee had been

<sup>1</sup> Report on Conciliation and Arbitration (1919), pp 107-108 *Parliamentary Papers*, 1920, XIX, pp 1-462.

<sup>2</sup> Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour, p 55 *Parliamentary Papers*, 1921, XL [Cd 1253]. On the West Coast of Scotland and in Dublin the rates were at that time 1s 6d lower than the corresponding rates in Belfast

<sup>3</sup> *Ulster and the Empire* This is excessive modesty, "unexcelled" might be replaced by "unapproached"

<sup>4</sup> In the House of Commons the Member for Duncairn called attention to what he seems to have regarded as a remarkable occurrence, viz, that 120,000 Orangemen should meet together, with "not one" policeman in attendance, and yet "there was not a single untoward incident that day". *Parl Debates*, 5th Series, vol 132, pp 711 sq

<sup>5</sup> According to a statement made in the House of Commons there had been, in the period between January, 1919, and March, 1920, 426 raids undertaken by Sinn Fein, as against 22,279 raids undertaken by the British authorities *Ibid.*, p 763 Cf. Sir Hamar Greenwood. "There is no coercion in Ireland There is not a soldier in Ireland to-day except for the purpose of protecting life." *Ibid.*, p. 729.



formed, consisting of both Protestants and Catholics, to prevent an outbreak of rioting, through their intervention the usual demonstrations were not held in Derry on the Twelfth.<sup>1</sup> But in Belfast he who in the House of Commons persistently and savagely attacked the Government for its failure to preserve the peace, used language most peculiar for one who professed to desire the restoration of order. Speaking of the Sinn Feiners, he said.

They have all kinds of insidious methods and organisations at work. Sometimes it is the Church. That does not make much way in Ulster. The more insidious method is tacking on the Sinn Fein question and the Irish Republican question to the Labour question. (A voice—"Ireland is the most Labour centre in the United Kingdom") I know that. What I say is this—these men who come forward posing as the friends of Labour care no more about Labour than does the man in the moon. Their real object, and the real insidious nature of their propaganda, is that they may mislead and bring about disunity amongst our own people; and in the end, before we know where we are, we may find ourselves in the same bondage and slavery as is the rest of Ireland in the South and West.

Beware of these insidious methods. Our duty is an absolutely clear one, and we must state it clearly on a day like this. We have been handed down, from the time of the battle of the Boyne and the siege of Derry—and they may have another siege before long—we have been handed down great traditions and great privileges, and in our Orange Order we have undertaken to preserve those and to hand them on to our children, and we must proclaim to-day clearly that, come what will, and be the consequences what they may, we in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Fein—(cheers)—no Sinn Fein organisation, no Sinn Fein methods . . .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Devlin, *ibid*, p. 729

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Whig*, July 13, 1920.

This forthright identification of Sinn Fein, Catholicism, and Labour as a trinity not to be tolerated—"be the consequences what they may"—is only one of numerous speeches delivered on the same glorious occasion, to say nothing of the steady stream of anonymous letters to the same effect printed in the daily papers.

The consequences were not long deferred

On July 21 men armed with sledge-hammers and other weapons swooped down on the Catholic workers in the shipyards, and did not even give them a chance for their lives. . . . The gates were smashed down with sledges, the vests and shirts of those at work were torn open to see were the men wearing any Catholic emblems, and then woe betide the man who was. One man was set upon, thrown into the dock, had to swim the Musgrave Channel, and having been pelted with rivets had to swim two or three miles, to emerge in streams of blood and rush to the police office in a nude state <sup>1</sup>

Not only Catholics, but all Protestants known or believed to have any connection with Sinn Fein or Socialist organisations were thus violently expelled from their employment <sup>2</sup>

"The origin of this lamentable and horrible affair", according to a newspaper account published next morning,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statement of Travers, deputy from the Belfast Expelled Workers, to the 26th Annual Meeting of the I L P & T U C, August 4, 1920. Cf Official Report

<sup>2</sup> Among the most valuable sources of information on the Belfast expulsions are Report of the 26th Annual Meeting, Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1920, Report of the British Trades Union Congress, 1920, pp 382-384, *ibid*, 1921, pp 109-122 and 267-277; *Parliamentary Debates*, Official Report, 5th Series, vol. 132, pp. 609-798 (debate on Supply—Irish Office Vote, July 22, 1920) and pp. 1088-1124 (debate on Adjournment Motion, July 26, 1920); *ibid.*, vol. 133, pp. 937-944 (Oral Answers) and pp. 1467-1508 (debate on Adjournment Motion, Oct. 25, 1920); *The Watchword and Voice of Labour*, July 31, 1920, and *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 5, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, July 22, 1920.

"seems to lie in the meeting held during the dinner hour yesterday, called in response to a poster which was displayed on the walls in the vicinity of the shipyards during yesterday morning. It was headed 'B P A', and called for a 'Mass meeting of the Unionist and Protestant workers of the shipyards', to be held at the South Yard (Workman, Clark & Co), at 1.30 on Wednesday, July 21st. The notice wound up with 'God Save the King'. There were also inscriptions on the walls, 'Remember, Wednesday, 21st July'." At this meeting a resolution was adopted to the effect that anyone in the shipyards refusing to sign a declaration that he did not belong to and would not join the Sinn Féin organisation should get no work in the shipyards. "As employees they would stand by the employers, and the employers would stand by them." A hearty invitation was issued to every member of "Carson's navy" to join (if he were not already a member) the Orange Order, the Ulster Volunteer Force, or the Ulster Labour Party.<sup>1</sup>

In the House of Commons the following day, Sir Edward Carson indignantly repudiated the responsibility imputed to him by Devlin: "I deplore it; I do not want retaliation; but let us be reasonable."<sup>2</sup> Had not Colonel Smyth,<sup>3</sup> a native of Banbridge, been murdered in Cork? Had the railwaymen not refused to transport his body from Cork to Banbridge? "Are we the only people who are never to have a feeling over these matters?" This lame effort to shift the responsibility onto "natural" causes cannot ab-

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, July 21, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *Parl. Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 132, p. 701.

<sup>3</sup> It seems that the Orange workers, like the Members of Parliament in the case of the Maharajah of Swat, knew that this policeman was dead before they knew he was alive. Not even Sir H. Greenwood would commit himself to endorsement of Carson's interpretation. cf *Parl. Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 132, p. 735.

solve Sir Edward from his share of the guilt for an outrage which he has steadfastly refused to denounce. Carson was well aware of the mental condition of the people he was addressing on that fateful 12th July<sup>1</sup>. A man of his intelligence and experience must have been fully aware of the normal consequences of political excitement upon Orange workers and can hardly have failed to foresee the inflammatory effects of his exhortation.

"How was it", asked *The Watchword and Voice of Labour*, "this meeting was held on harbour property? Was permission given to hold it? If not, what steps, if any, the Harbour Commissioner contemplates taking? Would a Trade Union meeting have been allowed to be held at the same place?"<sup>2</sup> The answer to this last question depends, now as always, on the nature of the trade union. In 1907, Larkin was arrested for making a speech outside the shipyard gates, on what was technically harbour property.<sup>3</sup> To this day the organiser of the I. T. & G. W. U. has to choose his ground carefully before addressing the dockers near the waterfront. In 1920, however, Workman, Clark and Co. permitted meetings of their loyal Protestant employees in their yards, just as from 1912 to 1914 they permitted the use of their property as a drill ground by the Ulster Volunteers. The position of the employers was made still more clear by the refusal of Harland and Wolff to segregate their Catholic employees in a special part of the plant under mili-

<sup>1</sup> "I believe", he had occasion to inform the Commons a few weeks later, "there are from 20,000 to 30,000 children there who never go to school, for the simple reason that there are no schools to which they can go . . . I know the priests of his [Devlin's] Church take the greatest care that the children are educated, and kept well in hand. Our children do not want to be educated by the priests, or through the priests." *Parl. Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 132, pp. 711-713.

<sup>2</sup> *The Watchword and Voice of Labour*, July 31, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> *Northern Whig*, July 3, 1907.

tary guard. Nor would this firm agree to close its works altogether, lest the hooligan element break loose and property in the city suffer.<sup>1</sup> "Good relations have always existed between the employers and men in this world-famed Ship-building firm."<sup>2</sup>

From the shipyards the "pogrom" spread rapidly. By July 26, even James Sexton was viewing the situation with alarm: "Men who have worked together harmoniously for years and years, Protestant and Catholic, on the docks of Belfast, are to-day divided into two hostile sections, the Protestant element, influenced by the 12th July outrage, are to-day driving the Catholic element of the same union from their work at the docks."<sup>3</sup> Virtually the whole of the Catholic working population were driven from their employment.<sup>4</sup> In the brief interval between Carson's 12th of July speech and the outbreak in the shipyards on the 21st, the railwaymen, assembled in congress at Belfast, had adopted a resolution<sup>5</sup> setting forth that "without complete

<sup>1</sup> Report of 26th Irish Congress, *op cit*, p. 102, *cf* also British Trades Union Congress Report, 1922, p. 113

<sup>2</sup> *Ulster's Claim on Britain* "Ulster and the Empire."

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, op cit*, v 132, p. 1104 "Only this afternoon I had messages from Belfast to say that the situation there is getting more intense every hour and the spirit that has been raised by these incidents on the 12th July is alone responsible for the discussion and division amongst the members of my own organisation. I now take the opportunity of denouncing any attempt on the part of any one inside or outside this House of raising that hatred that exists between the two people, members of the one union with different opinions, to the detriment of the industrial benefit of the men I represent."

<sup>4</sup> The docker members of the I. T. & G. W. U. form a striking exception; they, though almost exclusively Catholics, retained control of the deep-sea docks. It will be noted that the shipping companies using these docks could be paralysed by pressure applied by the I. T. & G. W. U., at Dublin, Cork, and other Irish ports.

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Thomas assumed responsibility for the drafting of this resolution, *Parl Debates, op cit*, v 132, p. 781.

unity amongst the working classes, who should not allow either religious or political differences to prevent their emancipation, which can only be achieved through a great international brotherhood the world over, no satisfactory progress can be made." This theory did not long govern in practice, though, perhaps in the light of the example of their General Secretary, the railway workers were more discriminating than men in other employments. Early in September, 1920, at a meeting of the employees of the Great Northern Railway, the following resolution was adopted:

That we, the workmen, have no grievance against our Catholic fellow workmen as such, but we do object to an organisation known as Sinn Fein, that has caused brutal murders of his Majesty's subjects in carrying out their duties.

We hereby resolve not to work with any person or persons having sympathy with or assisting in the Sinn Fein movement; but we have no hesitation in resolving to work with any of our fellow-workmen who sign a declaration of loyalty to their King and Constitution, and we are prepared to assist such workers for the welfare of the firm in which we are employed.<sup>1</sup>

Similar declarations were submitted to the employees of the other railways operating out of Belfast

Rare indeed were the employers who objected to the steps taken by their men. One such was Mr. Davidson, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sirocco Works. On August 10, at the dinner hour, he assured his men that "he looked upon Sinn Feiners as nothing short of German Huns and Russian Bolsheviks in disguise, and whose traitorous animosity to King and country were only equalled by their murderous disposition towards all who were loyal Unionists", but at the same time he urged that not all Catholics were Sinn Feiners, whereas some Protestants were. In

<sup>1</sup> *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, Sept. 9, 1920.

short, this gentleman, who, in 1906, had signalised himself by requiring his employees to sign a pledge that they neither did nor would belong to any trade union whatsoever—a performance he attempted to repeat, on a smaller scale, in 1914 against the Irish Transport Union<sup>1</sup>—, wanted his labour to be “free”. If his men were to usurp his prerogative of submitting forms for the signature of Sirocco employees, he might transfer his business to Detroit, where he was already interested in a plant larger than his Belfast works. In this case the work of Carson and his tail had been too well done. At a meeting of the men on the following day, addressed by a “deputation from the shipyards representing the Ulster Protestant Association”, the men persisted in their refusal to associate with Catholics of any political complexion.<sup>2</sup>

The repeated professions of Carson and the employers that they were doing everything possible to effect a restoration of the right of employment to those who, by the Orange rank and file, were styled “papists” and “rotten prods”, must be heavily discounted. On July 22 it was asserted on the floor of the House of Commons that “a permanent member of the Ulster Unionist Council said the other day ‘The Ulster operative and workers divided are more easily exploited than when they are united’.”<sup>3</sup> The assertion passed unchallenged. On October 25, Sir Edward Carson himself, in summing up what he chose to regard as the causes of the outbreak three months earlier, affirmed: “I am prouder of my friends in the shipyards than of any other friends I have in the whole world.”<sup>4</sup> The man who

<sup>1</sup> Cf *supra*, chap x, pp. 293-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Whig*, Aug. 11 and Aug. 12, 1920

<sup>3</sup> C L'E Malone, *Parl. Debates, op. cit.*, v. 132, p. 765

<sup>4</sup> *Parl Debates, op cit*, v. 133, p. 1493. “I am surprised that the right hon Gentleman who has just addressed us [Mr Clynes] should think that there was some slur upon those men because they took that course.”

was to succeed Sir Edward in the active leadership of Ulster Unionists, Sir James Craig, informed a meeting of shipyard workers in Belfast that he approved of the action they had taken.<sup>1</sup>

Under such auspices was Belfast launched on a period of murder and arson, unparalleled in intensity and brutality anywhere else in Ireland—a period that was to last for more than two years. The Catholics, deprived of the means of earning a livelihood, attempted reprisals, but beyond doubt a very large percentage of outrages assigned by the Press to “Sinn Féin” were organised and directed from Unionist headquarters in the old Town Hall. The details of this disgusting period may be passed over here; it is sufficient to note the curious coincidence between the destruction by fire of several large business establishments and the cessation of the nightmare period.

Those two years of frightfulness have left their mark deep on the labour movement. Not only have wages plunged downward with amazing velocity, but hope of restoring any degree of mutual confidence between Catholic and Protestant workers has sunk to an extremely low ebb. In the Old Town Hall the “admiral of Carson’s navy” sits piously praying for a new Flood; on a wall-map of the municipality the areas to be cleansed are heavily inked in. Revolver and bomb and torch have failed to drive the hated “papists” and “rotten prods” from the loyal city; now God must take up His work in His own way.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to Devlin, Craig, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, said “He thought it only fair that he should be asked a question in return, and that was ‘Do I approve of the action you have taken in the past?’ I say, ‘Yes’” (*Parl. Debates, op cit*, v. 133, p. 1501.) According to men who were present at the meeting, Craig’s words were. “If you ask me my opinion of your action, I say, ‘Well done’.”

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph, as well as the description of the workings of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, rests on an interview with Mr.



Meanwhile the members of the Irish Transport Union, about nine out of ten of whom are Catholics, hang grimly on to their control of the lower, or deep-sea docks. Men who have somehow survived those two bloody years, punctuated with hairbreadth escapes from murder by "special police", find themselves still faced with the same brutal struggle for existence in their native city. The threat of sudden death has given way only to the threat of unemployment and slow starvation. Desperately on the alert against their supersession by surplus workers from the shipyards, they refuse membership in their Union and consequently hope of employment to the persecutors of 1920, now themselves the heaviest sufferers.

Valuable as has been the red herring of politics in diverting the energy of the workers from the pursuit of their class interests, the "builders of Empire" have not omitted auxiliary means of averting restlessness on the part of the raw material of empire. In the midst of his efforts "to erect an edifice that will stand the vicissitudes of political upheavals and the chances of an ever changing world",<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Carson is said to have become aware of the fact that certain elements among his followers desired more democracy in the work of construction. That gentleman, whose boast it is that he represents his people as honestly as he can,<sup>2</sup> thereupon called into consultation a fellow-lawyer, Mr. J. M. Andrews, and the district chairman of the ship-

Grant, M.P., district chairman of the Shipwrights' Society, and on documents courteously supplied by him. In view of the allegation by a Belfast Protestant of high reputation that from 1920 to 1922 arms were given out from the old Town Hall, it would be interesting to know just why "places where attacks took place" are picked out on the map referred to with little Orange flags.

<sup>1</sup> *Ulster and the Empire*

<sup>2</sup> *Parl Debates, op cit*, v. 133, p. 1492: "I know perfectly well what would happen to me if I represented them dishonestly—and I hope it would happen."

wrights' society, Mr. W. Grant. Thus it came about that these three persons became, in April, 1914, charter members of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, which is "an Association of *Workers* formed to support and maintain the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland".<sup>1</sup> Three categories of persons may be coopted to membership by the Association: (a) "every Unionist worker who shall in the opinion of the Members of the Association be deemed to be eligible"; (b) as an Honorary Member, "any Unionist who will in the opinion of the Members of the Association further the interest of the Association, although in the usual application of the word he may not be considered a worker"; (c) "Unionist women may be elected Members of the Association".<sup>2</sup> "Each Member shall pay a minimum subscription of 1/- per annum."<sup>3</sup> No Honorary Members have been elected; though many politicians are said to have sought to avail themselves of the provision, they have been rigorously excluded. The president, Lord Carson of Duncairn, and the chairman, Mr. J. M. Andrews, K.C., are and have been from the beginning regular members in full standing. The total membership is alleged to be about 30,000, Belfast itself accounting for about half of this figure.

Through the medium of this curious "Labour Association" three "Labour" candidates were nominated by the Unionist Party and triumphantly returned to Parliament at the "Khaki Election" in 1918.<sup>4</sup> Though nominally "La-

<sup>1</sup> *The Ulster Unionist Labour Association. What It Is*

<sup>2</sup> Constitution, Articles 3, 4, and 6.

<sup>3</sup> Rule No. 7.

<sup>4</sup> T. H. Burn, Typo. As	St Anne's Div	9,155 votes	6,144 majority
S. McGuffin, A. E. U.	Shankill	" 11,840	" 7,632 "
T. Donald, Shipwrights	Victoria	" 9,309	" 5,445 "
Cf. E. H. Carson	Duncairn	" 11,637	" 8,917 "
J. Devlin	Falls	" 8,488	" 5,243 "

These figures are taken from the *Constitutional Year Book for 1923*,

bour" representatives, they sat as Unionists pure and simple. The establishment, under the Act of 1920, of a separate legislature for Northern Ireland produced a loss of interest in maintaining this sham representation at Westminster. On the ground that labour legislation affecting the Six Counties will henceforth be dealt with exclusively at Belfast, the Ulster Unionist Council has assigned to its "Labour" department seats in the latter Parliament only. On the other hand, these seats were generously distributed. Of the 52 members of the House of Commons of Northern Ireland six sit as "Labour" representatives; one of the six, Mr Andrews, is, as Minister of Labour, a member of the Cabinet. "The Association had the high distinction paid them by having three of our Members elected to the Senate of Northern Ireland."<sup>1</sup> It is significant that notwithstanding its natural pride at thus supplying almost 15% of the sitting Members of Parliament,<sup>2</sup> the Association's proudest boast is its representation on the Ulster Unionist Council, whose tool the "Labour Association" is.

Despite the bogus character of this organisation, its existence and employment seem to point to a relaxation, however slight, of the grip exerted by canny "builders of Empire" in days gone by. The selection by official Unionists of even nominally labour candidates may be taken as an indication that there has been a growth of class consciousness among the workers of Northern Ireland sufficient to cause at least some uneasiness in the minds of Ulster's rulers.

The attempt to take advantage of whatever class consciousness there may be has not been lacking. Immediately after the War, Socialist activity was revived: on the eve of

<sup>1</sup> Ulster Unionist Labour Association, *Annual Report for 1921*.

<sup>2</sup> While some of the "Labour" members vote with the "Opposition", the majority have been consistent Government supporters. Cf. *Official Reports of Parliamentary Debates (Northern Ireland)*.

the "Khaki Election" the Belfast Labour Party was reconstituted;<sup>1</sup> two constituencies were contested by Independent Labour Party candidates; three were contested by trade-union candidates — unsuccessfully in all cases.<sup>2</sup> Undismayed by lack of success in the Parliamentary election, the resuscitated Labour Party threw itself, in January, 1920, into the municipal contest; aided by proportional representation the Labour Party returned ten members to the Belfast Corporation.<sup>3</sup> The first election to the House of Commons of Northern Ireland was not officially contested by the Labour Party; nevertheless the Party had one candidate in each of the four four-member constituencies in Belfast and one candidate in the eight-member constituency of County Down. Virtually without exception the labour candidates stood at the bottom of the poll. The four candidates in Belfast constituencies received among them only 2,813 first preferences out of a total of 165,514 ballot papers.

<sup>1</sup>The account of the Belfast Labour Party, except as otherwise indicated, rests on documents kindly furnished by the Secretary, supplemented by interviews with the most active leaders in the Belfast labour movement, past and present.

<sup>2</sup> *Pottinger Division.*

Capt H Dixon	Un	8,574
R C Porter	I. L. P.	2,513
J H Bennett	Lab	659
B Campbell	S F	393

*Shankill Division*

S McGuffin	Lab Un.	11,840
S Kyle	I L P	3,674
M Carolan	S. F.	534

The total votes recorded in the nine Belfast Divisions at the general election in Dec 1918 were distributed as follows

Unionist	51,362	votes for 5 candidates	} no cross contests
Lab "	30,304	" " 3 "	
Ind "	6,585	" " 2 "	
I. L. P.	6,187	" " 2 "	} one cross contest
Labour	6,636	" " 3 "	
Sinn Fem	8,761	" " 9 "	
Nationalist	10,937	" " 2 "	

Five Unionists, three Labour Unionists, and one Nationalist (Devlin, opposed by De Valera, but not by a Unionist) were returned. Cf. *Constitutional Year Book for 1923*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Before the next election (1923) proportional representation was abolished for municipal seats. Of the four Labour candidates who stood unofficially in 1923 one only was elected.

Making the most generous allowance for the practice of voting dead men and for intimidation under the reign of terror, the insignificance of the labour vote is conclusive evidence against the potency of labour consciousness in Belfast in the summer of 1921. The five Sinn Fein candidates in these same constituencies received 18,751 first preferences, the five Nationalist candidates 16,502. To be sure, the four Unionist "Labour" candidates received 37,898 first preferences, as against 89,550 for eleven straight Unionist candidates<sup>1</sup>. As, however, there were only four Unionist candidates, inclusive of those designated as "Labour", in each of the four-member constituencies in Belfast, it is obvious that there could be no genuine competition between Unionists and Unionist Labourites; all good Unionists must vote for the alleged "Labour" men as well as for those Unionist candidates not so labelled.

Yet Belfast Socialists refused to be disheartened. Another opportunity to contest an election to the House of Commons of Northern Ireland has not yet arisen<sup>2</sup>. However, Belfast still has four seats at Westminster. Since 1921 there have been three general elections in Great Britain. In 1922 no attempt was made from any quarter to oppose the return of four Unionists for Belfast. In 1923, however, the Labour Party decided to contest West Belfast. Midgley, an ex-service man and newly-chosen Secretary of the Labour Party, entered the contest on little more than a fortnight's notice. Despite his handicap the Labour candidate ran up a poll of 22,255 votes against 24,975 for Sir Robert Lynn, editor of the *Northern Whig*, the chief journal of the "builders of Empire"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Constitutional Year Book for 1923*, p. 286

<sup>2</sup> This was written in Jan., 1925. While this book was in course of publication, an election was held in Northern Ireland, at which three Labour candidates were returned. Analysis of the returns however, does not compel revision of the conclusions of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Constitutional Year Book for 1924*, p. 251

The astonishing strength displayed by the labour candidate does not, however, necessarily imply a corresponding strength of labour consciousness. West Belfast is, though in somewhat altered form, the constituency long represented at Westminster by Joseph Devlin. It comprises the great bulk of the Catholic population of Belfast, including as it does the Falls Road district. As there was no opposition to the Unionist other than the Socialist, the political and politico-religious enemies of the Ulster Empire had to make common cause with its socio-economic enemies. Under the circumstances, Midgley, though a Protestant by birth and a member of the Independent Labour Party, was perhaps less a socialist-labour candidate than he was a Catholic-Nationalist candidate. Yet the inference must not be too strongly pressed. At the same election North Belfast was contested by an ex-policeman, disgruntled at his treatment by the authorities; in a campaign in which he stressed the view that the Orange rank and file were not receiving fair treatment from their leaders he met defeat only by a margin approximately equal to that in Midgley's case<sup>1</sup>. Bearing in mind that North Belfast was the scene of William Walker's heroic struggles, it may legitimately be presumed that the survival in this district, once the most wide-awake labour centre in Ireland, of a measure of labour philosophy contributed to the heavy vote for the opposition candidate.

Whatever interpretation be placed on the electoral figures, it is certain that the Labour Party acquired great prestige and a new standing in the political life of Ulster as a result of this contest. Steps were immediately taken to convert it into a more efficient instrument. The name was changed,

<sup>1</sup> T. E. McConnell U 16,771

T. Henderson I. 15,171

Midgley was defeated by 2,720 votes in an electorate of 67,262

Henderson by 1,600 votes in an electorate of 46,844. *Ibid.*

in January, 1924, to "The Labour Party (Northern Ireland)". A conference of delegates from all parts of the six counties was held in March. At this meeting the project of forming a non-partisan Labour Party for the whole Northern area was unanimously approved. Local Labour Parties, intended to be constituent elements of the new Party, were formed in several provincial centres. A draft constitution, on the lines of the constitution of the British Labour Party, was prepared for submission to a further meeting in the autumn.<sup>1</sup> Further progress was interrupted by the General Election at the end of October. In this election, Midgley again contested West Belfast, but in this contest, which was attended by threats of personal violence to the labour candidate and by much disorder at the polls, he met defeat by a larger majority than in the preceding year. While a fraction of the labour candidate's votes were diverted to a Sinn Fein candidate, Sir Robert Lynn increased his poll.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, the Labour Party (Northern Ireland) can hope to make no substantial headway until political and sectarian issues are more clearly apprehended by the work-

<sup>1</sup> For a more extended account of the Party's activities, see its *Annual Report for 1923-1924*. The Draft Constitution provides (Art 4, Sect. 1) · "The Central Labour Party shall consist of affiliated Trade Union Branches, Co-operative Societies, Socialist Societies, The Trades Council and Trades Federations, and the Local Labour Parties in the area." As the Irish Labour Party, on the other hand, is constituted on a purely trade-union basis, the Labour Party (Northern Ireland) cannot become affiliated with it.

<sup>2</sup> The figures, as published in the supplement to *The Times*, Oct 31, 1924, were

Sir Robert Lynn (U.)	28,435
H Midgley (Ind. Lab )	21,122
P Nash (Rep )	2,688

This gives a Unionist majority of 4,625 as against a majority of only 2,720 in 1923. It is noteworthy that Mary MacSwiney and Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington campaigned for the Republican candidate

ing classes of Belfast and relegated to the background in favour of economic and social issues. A considerable amount of educational work must be done, among trade unionists no less than among the unorganised workers. Facts rather than theories must be drilled into their minds; the workers of Ulster have theories enough already. No amount of metaphysical dogmatism can affect the existing beliefs of Orange or of Hibernian toilers. Until the way has been paved with some knowledge of the actual facts of history, politics, and economics, no new set of theories can capture the hearts and minds of the working classes of Belfast or undermine the foundations on which the "builders of Empire" have striven "to build up a system creditable to and interwoven with the British".<sup>1</sup>

From this standpoint the history of workers' education in Belfast is a record of bitter disappointment.<sup>2</sup> "The Belfast Branch of the Workers' Educational Association was founded in 1910." At first there were held "tutorial classes on 'Industrial History' and 'Economics'." About 70 students" attended. "About 15 Trade Union branches were associated with the W. E. A. in pre-war days, but never took (as such) any active part in the work of education." During the war attendance at classes was halved, but since the war the number of students in attendance has increased. "Last year (1923-1924) the highest number was reached, 187." On the other hand, the interest of the trade unions has diminished to the vanishing point. "Trade Union officials are usually so much engrossed in the petty and general needs of their members, that outside questions, such as education, receive scant or no attention from them. Conse-

<sup>1</sup> *Ulster and the Empire*

<sup>2</sup> This account of the work of the W. E. A. in Belfast is taken from a memorandum drawn up by the Secretary of the Belfast branch. The passages in quotation marks are excerpted from this statement.



quently, the rank and file get no lead. This condition of affairs is general and *not* peculiar to Belfast."

Even more disillusioning than the paucity of students and the apathy of the union leaders is the nature of the instruction given.

At first the method was "tutorial classes", *i e.*, classes which study one subject, and the members of which are expected to write an essay during each term, in order to test the progress of the study. In recent years, the work has taken the form of "popular lectures" in the social, political and economic subjects: that is to say the course is not always confined to one subject, and a definite course of study is not followed. In other subjects (Literature, Science, etc.) a series of 5 or 6 lectures thereon forms the course. Each lecture lasts about 1 or 1½ hours, and questions are invited and answered by the lecturer

Combined with this drift from an attempt to organise serious educational effort to the all-too-familiar "popular lecture", there has been a steady drift from social and economic questions to the more innocuous subjects so dear to the ears of the idle person who yearns "to be educated". Starting in 1910 with classes on "Industrial History" and "Economics", the curriculum had developed by 1920-21 to the point where, to a class on "Social Economics" and lectures on "Social Tendencies of the 19th Century" had been added lectures on "Geology (Belfast district)". This was the last year in which the class method was attempted. Last year (1923-1924) lectures on "Celtic Philology" and "Astrophysics" competed with lectures on the "Industrial Revolution" and "Economic Problems of the Day", while "Greek Political Thought" illumined the whole. For the current year (1924-1925) six courses are announced: "Study of Literature", "Literature in Rome", "Literature in Greece", "The Foundation Stones of the Universe", "Development of Chemistry", and last, if not

least, "Economic Problems of the Day". To be sure, the "Saturday Evening Discussion Class (for social and economic questions)", instituted last year, is to be continued.

It may be that only through the medium of the stars in their courses or of re-examination of the rock of ages can the Belfast workers be weaned from the "old faith—the Puritan faith—that has made England and Scotland what they are" and to which "Ulster has clung like the ivy to the vine". But if no more direct approach can be made, and if the trade-union leaders cannot spare the time to provide themselves with a wider and less befogged mental horizon, the prospects of effective work by the Labour Party cannot be described as bright.

In industrial action nothing of importance has been achieved or even attempted in the last five years. The Government of Northern Ireland can justly point with pride to the fact that "there has, of course, been a number of disputes but none of them has been of really serious consequence from the point of view of its effect on the community, and the majority of them have been settled without recourse to a stoppage of work".<sup>1</sup> In the "Ulster Industries Section" of the "Times Trade and Engineering Supplement", published August 9, 1924, Sir Robert Lynn, M.P., managing director and editor of the Belfast *Northern Whig*, may well write that Ulster's "industries have always been remarkably free from the labour disputes which have handicapped trade in Great Britain. . . . There is no part of the Empire where the relations between the employers and the employed are more intimate or more harmonious."<sup>2</sup>

But the spirit of reasonableness and accommodation attributed to the workers may be not unconnected with the

<sup>1</sup> Official Memorandum on the Labour Services of Northern Ireland: "What the Northern Government is doing for Labour."

<sup>2</sup> "Ulster To-day"

fact that besides the employed there are the unemployed—40,000 strong. In January, 1922, the “percentage of unemployment” in Northern Ireland is officially stated to have been 26·39, as against 17·4 in Great Britain. By June, 1924, the figure for Northern Ireland had been reduced to 16·4, for Great Britain to 9·4.<sup>1</sup> Since then there has set in an upward trend in the figures for Ulster, due to the fact that “recently a depression, which one is glad to believe is temporary, has set in in the shipyards”<sup>2</sup>

It remains to note one more bit of the masonry of Empire. The fear expressed at the Irish Trades Union Congress in 1914 that with respect to legislation “Labour in Ulster would be nobody’s child”<sup>3</sup> if Partition should become an accomplished fact, has not been justified by the event. Anxious to minimise the fact of exclusion from the United Kingdom, the Parliament of Northern Ireland has been at pains to imitate Westminster legislation. Thus, in an official memorandum entitled “Acts of Parliament passed through the Parliament of Northern Ireland at the instance of the Minister of Labour”, it is stated that the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1923 “made some modifications in the system of Workmen’s Compensation similar to those made at the same time in Great Britain”. Again, the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1924 “gave power to the Government to apply in Northern Ireland even though the Northern Parliament might not be in Session, certain provisions extending both the amount and duration of the Unemployment Benefit and the conditions for its receipt if adopted in Great Britain”.<sup>4</sup> In connection with this last

<sup>1</sup> These statistics are taken from an official memorandum supplied by the Ministry of Labour (Northern Ireland).

<sup>2</sup> “What the Northern Government is doing for Labour.”

<sup>3</sup> D. R. Campbell, Belfast Trades Council, 21st Annual Report, I. T. U. C. & L. P., p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> “The necessary Order in Council has since been made”

item, another official memorandum explains "What the Northern Government is doing for Labour", as follows:

*Relief of unemployment* While the payment of benefit to persons who through no fault of their own cannot obtain work is obviously necessary, it is by common consent not so good as the provision of work, and accordingly the Government, with the cordial assistance of local authorities throughout Ulster, has initiated Relief Works, the capital cost of which is over £2,615,375. Government funds are subsidising these works to the extent of over £664,356. Employment has been found by this means for some thousands of men and at the present moment there are about 2,659 men directly employed on them, while an unknown but certainly large number is employed indirectly.

In addition, the Loans Guarantee Acts provide special facilities for employers for expenditure on capital reconstruction and the like, and as a result of the operation of these Acts seven big ships have been built in Belfast and more are likely to follow.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1923 a Trade Boards Act (Northern Ireland) <sup>2</sup> "made a number of alterations in the administration of Trade Boards, designed to simplify and speed up the machinery" <sup>3</sup> Though speeding up the machinery is altogether too likely to mean speeding down the wages, the leaders of the Labour Party (Northern Ireland) profess their satisfaction with this amendment of Westminster legislation. On the other hand, Professor Henry, whose sympathetic attitude toward the Belfast workers has won him a high place in their esteem, resigned his chairmanship in protest

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum on the Labour Services of the Government of Northern Ireland, pp 2-3

<sup>2</sup> 13 & 14 Geo. 5, c. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum on Acts of the Parliament of Northern Ireland initiated by the Ministry of Labour.

More important than legislation is administrative interpretation. Under the Act, Trade Boards are empowered to fix special minimum rates for "persons who are learning a trade"; indentured apprentices are also exempt from the application of the general minimum rate.<sup>1</sup> To this provision of the Act the Minister of Labour drew "the special attention of employers in Trade Board trades in Northern Ireland". "In order that employers may take advantage of minimum rates of wages fixed by a Trade Board in accordance with this provision", a circular-letter from the Ministry informs such employers that to be eligible for the sub-minimum rate, learners must hold certificates from the Trade Board and apprentices must be registered with the same authority. "In the absence of such certificates or applications therefor, or of such registration, these workers would come within the scope of the determinations of the Trade Board in regard to rates of wages payable to adult workers or to rates of wages (if any) payable to juvenile workers other than learners or apprentices" "In these circumstances", the letter continues, "your firm may perhaps wish to review the classification of its workers and to make application to the Secretary, Office of Trade Boards, 14 Bridge Street, Belfast, on behalf of any workers whom it is desired to remunerate at the minimum rates fixed for learners or apprentices so that they shall be registered as certified learners or as indentured apprentices, as the case may be".<sup>2</sup> To this friendly suggestion the Ministry of Labour appended a solemn admonition: "The Minister trusts that in the course of forthcoming inspections by the Department no case will be found where workers other than those duly registered as learners or apprentices by the Trade Board are

<sup>1</sup> 13 & 14 Geo 5, c 32, section 7.

<sup>2</sup> Circular-letter "To Employers in Trade Board Trades in Northern Ireland", dated 31st March, 1924, Reference No. 7586/23.

being paid at the rates fixed by the Board for workers of these classes" Apparently the Government of Northern Ireland has no desire unnecessarily to embarrass its judiciary with regrettable prosecutions for technical offences brought by over-conscientious inspectors.<sup>1</sup>

"Ulstermen are ready to adapt themselves to new conditions", says Sir Robert Lynn, M P ,<sup>2</sup> with the facile superficiality of the chameleon, Ulster is robing her system, woven to withstand "the chances of an ever changing world", in the most new-fangled habiliments, patterned after the Westminster fashion. A Ministry of Labour under the guidance of a K C absorbed in the possibilities of the "exploitation of natural resources"<sup>3</sup> is at worst a slight concession to the taste of the times, at best a valuable tool to aid in the erection of "an edifice that will stand the vicissitudes of political upheavals". "I look upon the Ministry of Labour", says the Prime Minister, "as one of the most important ministries in my Government I believe that in future years the decision that we have come to in this matter [of establishing a Ministry of Labour] will be generally approved by the great mass of the working classes of our community"<sup>4</sup> Weak and halting though its progress has been,<sup>5</sup> the labour movement has driven the "Empire build-

<sup>1</sup> *Cf supra*, p 360

<sup>2</sup> "Ulster To-day", *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Right Hon J M Andrews, "Industrial Future of Northern Ireland" in *Times Trade and Engineering Supplement*, *op cit*

<sup>4</sup> *Official Reports of Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, vol. i, p. 172

<sup>5</sup> In the last municipal elections (Jan, 1925), the Labour Party won two of its four contests "McMullen [Secretary of the Belfast Branch, I T. & G W U] in a great fight wrested the representation of Smithfield Ward from the Nationalist Party and recovered it for Labour . . . Harry Midgley won Dock Ward from the Unionists . Jimmy Grimley did not succeed against a very strong Nationalist candidate in Falls Ward,

ers" to modify their style of architecture. But the foundation of the edifice and its structural principles remain unaltered. Behind the rococo façade there is no room for Labour to share in the political power. "We do desire most earnestly", Sir James has enigmatically remarked, "that the great labour community in this portion of the world should have a large say in the administration of the affairs in which they have a preponderating voice."<sup>1</sup>

but in a great fight he came within a short distance of victory The fourth Labour candidate failed to win in Court Ward ." *Voice of Labour*, Jan 31, 1925

<sup>1</sup> *Parl Debates (Northern Ireland)*, *op. cit*, vol 1, p 173

## CHAPTER XIII

### BRITISH LABOUR AND IRISH

"WE are hoping", Ben Tillett told the British Trades Union Congress at Derby in 1918, "that, instead of Sinn Fein or anything else trying to separate the working classes of Ireland from this country, the workers of Ireland will try to realise that they are in the same bondage as ourselves, and that the better wages and conditions they enjoy to-day are due to the work of the Trade Unionists in this country, and that the employers and farmers in Ireland are even more rapacious than our own employers."<sup>1</sup> Among all the aristocracy of insular toilers, Ben Tillett alone was capable of imbibing the inspiration necessary to the man who would use such language at a Trades Union Congress in England. Not until Sir Hamar Greenwood had been driven to admit, in the House of Commons, that the British Government could not function in Ireland,<sup>2</sup> could any other reputable trade-union leader bring himself to acknowledge that Ireland differed from the rest of the United Kingdom to any greater extent than Lancashire differed from Yorkshire. That the United Kingdom really embraced two countries, as

<sup>1</sup> 50th Annual Report, B T U C, p 241. Subsequent references to the Reports of the annual Trades Union Congresses and Labour Party Conferences have been omitted except where the reference is not clear from the context.

<sup>2</sup> On July 22, 1920 Sir Hamar Greenwood summed up a statement of the conditions prevailing in Ireland, as follows "It is no use, therefore, in attempting to carry on in the disturbed condition of Ireland, and to rely on the ordinary Courts of the Realm." *Parl. Debates*, 5th Series, v. 132, p 739.



distinct one from the other as are Belgium and Holland, is a concept that is still difficult for Britons to entertain. Accustomed as they are to the participation in the forefront of their labour movement of countless expatriated Irishmen, brought up to believe in "Paddy and the Pig", they have regarded the Irish as Britons whose misfortune it has been to be made disorderly and childish by the influences of a peculiar climate, priestcraft, and a too-green sod. These unfortunate brethren the British Labour Movement has ever sympathised with, and striven to educate in the benefits of trade-union organisation. Though well aware that the Irish were not fit to be left to their own devices, the leaders of British labour have always felt that the Government was mistaken "in seeking to rule Ireland by force rather than by love and commonsense".<sup>1</sup>

The tendency of Irish trade unions to affiliate with societies in Great Britain, at first by correspondence or systems of passes, and later, with the improvement of communications, by actual organic connection, has been described in an earlier chapter.<sup>2</sup> In another chapter has been pointed out how, in the second half of the nineteenth century, this tendency was accentuated, and how British trade unions broke virgin ground in Ireland by organising in new branches men for whom no autochthonous trade society existed.<sup>3</sup> By 1868 Irish trade unionism was already so much involved with English trade unionism that Dublin was represented in the very first Trades Union Congress, held at Manchester in that year.

The character of the labour movement at this period is sufficiently indicated in the encomium pronounced by the

<sup>1</sup> R. Smillie, whose statement was greeted with cheers, 51st Report, B. T. U. C., 1919, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *supra*, chap. IV.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *supra*, chap. VI.

*Times* on the tenth annual Congress, "which, if at times somewhat irregular in its proceedings, was, on the whole, moderate in tone and altogether free from anything like bitterness towards employers or invective against society".<sup>1</sup> Though after the first burst of enthusiasm no Irish delegates attended these early Congresses, British Labour was anxious to promote the era of good feeling throughout the United Kingdom. In 1879 the Parliamentary Committee suggested that "nothing can be more calculated to promote contentment amongst Irish workmen than voluntary extension of liberties to Ireland similar to those which English workmen enjoy". As an earnest of its sincere interest in Ireland, Congress held its thirteenth Annual Meeting in Dublin. This Congress of 1880 was attended by eighteen Dublin delegates, half of whom were members of amalgamated unions, and was presided over, according to custom, by a local trade unionist.<sup>2</sup> No delegates attended from Belfast or any other Irish centre. "The only new subject introduced was the Irish land laws."<sup>3</sup>

In this cryptic summary is concealed the mainspring of Congress' interest in Ireland. That the woes of the Irish peasantry were not *per se* the object of interest was made abundantly clear at succeeding Congresses. Delegates to the Manchester Congress of 1882 were alarmed by a newspaper report that Michael Davitt had been invited to address them, and subsided only on receiving official assurance to the contrary. In 1883 Joseph Arch deprecated the notion that the Irish land laws were any worse than the English, though the latter had "not produced the same discontented results". In 1886 Congress' flagging interest in the "cruel laws that

<sup>1</sup> London *Times*, Sept. 24, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> J. Murphy, one of the two delegates representing the Ironfounders of England, Ireland and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. History of Past Congresses, 28th Report, B. T. U. C., 1895

existed in Ireland " had to be stimulated by a reminder that they had the " effect of driving thousands of Irish people from their homes to overstock the English and Scotch labour market " Resolutions in favour of improving the condition of Irish workers must be placed in the same category with resolutions against the competition of convict labour or of cheap imported goods If nothing were done to raise standards in all parts of the United Kingdom, workers from the neglected parts could not be prevented from migrating to more favoured areas, where their low standard would inevitably depress the position and nullify the gains of the organised workers The time had passed when British workmen could safeguard themselves by refusing to work with Irishmen. The problem had to be squarely met. Every encouragement must be given to trade-union organisation in Ireland Conditions, such as the shadowing of trade unionists by the Royal Irish Constabulary, which admittedly would be intolerable in England, must be done away with Social legislation applying to Great Britain must be extended to Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The Irish municipal franchise must be assimilated to the parliamentary franchise, though Congress was unwilling to accept the suggestion that the Irish franchise be assimilated to the English <sup>2</sup>

From Irish trade unionists Congress received occasional assistance in its deliberations Rarely was any financial contribution forthcoming In both respects Belfast made a

<sup>1</sup> Even at this early period a London delegate (Mr Coote) " drew attention to the fact that in Parliament the Irish members declared that they did not desire the privileges sought for ", to which the only Irish delegate present (A Bowman, representing the Flax Dressers' Society and the Belfast United Trades Council) " replied that he had nothing to do with the Irish members of Parliament. He represented trade-unionism " 16th Report, B. T. U. C., 1883, p. 44 At this same Congress Bowman pointed out that in the whole of Ireland, with its 3,697 factories and workshops, there were only three inspectors, *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> 15th Report, B. T. U. C., 1882, p. 37.

better showing in the decade of the eighties than did Dublin<sup>1</sup> From 1890 onward, however, the number of Irish delegates in attendance increased, owing mainly to the adoption by several of the amalgamated unions of the practice of including a member of a Dublin or Belfast branch in their delegations. The new departure accompanied an intensification of the effort to absorb existing Irish societies into the British amalgamateds, and to extend trade-union organisation among the thousands of Irish workers outside the movement. The better to educate the Irish, Congress in 1892 accepted the invitation of the Belfast Trades Council to meet in that city the following year.

At the Belfast Congress (1893), attended by six Dublin delegates as well as twenty-seven from Belfast and one from Newry, a supreme effort was made to stem the restlessness of leading Irish trade unionists, avowedly caused by the relegation of mere Irish resolutions to the end of the Congress agenda, but possibly not unconnected with the fact that in 1891 Congress had revised its Standing Orders in such fashion as to require the payment of affiliation fees in rough proportion to the membership of the constituent organisations. To insure satisfactory attention to Irish questions, Standing Order 11 was amended to require that one member of the Parliamentary Committee should be an Irish delegate. At the same time, what seems to have been a concerted effort was made to secure the election to the new Parliamentary Committee<sup>2</sup> of S. Monro, one of the

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note the attitude of Congress toward the land agitation of the eighties. In 1887 was adopted a resolution, viewing "with alarm and indignation" the suppression of a public meeting in Ennis, "called to express the grievances under which they believe themselves to suffer." An amendment moved by S. Monro, delegate of the Belfast Trades Council, that "this Congress recognises the necessity of law and order being enforced, as preliminary to the remedy of their grievances", was lost by 85 votes to 7.

<sup>2</sup> The new Standing Order could not take effect till next Congress.

delegates of the Belfast Trades Council and president of this Congress. Monro failed of election by a narrow margin, but the attempt to stave off Irish disaffection was doomed to more dismal failure. Yet the effort was not immediately abandoned. Next year, at Norwich, the secretary of the Belfast Trades Council<sup>1</sup> was declared elected, under the new Standing Order 11, to the Parliamentary Committee, though eight British delegates were ahead of him in number of votes polled. At the same time room was found for the Secretary of the Dublin Trades Council<sup>2</sup> on a committee elected to draw up a scheme for a general federation of trade unions.

Meanwhile, however, the Irish Trades Union Congress had been launched on its independent career. Though the Irish Congress was avowedly intended only to supplement the work of the British Congress, and though Irish trades councils and trade unions sent seven delegates to the Norwich Congress (1894),<sup>3</sup> the leaders of British Labour had come to the conclusion that the Trades Union Congress was too unwieldy an instrument for the work of organising Irish workers. In the interval between the Norwich (1894) and Cardiff (1895) Congresses, the Parliamentary Committee revised the Standing Orders, rescinding the provision for special representation of Ireland and excluding Trades Councils from representation at Congress.<sup>4</sup>

The ratification, after a sharp struggle, of this action by the Cardiff Congress (1895) marks the parting of the

<sup>1</sup> R. Sheldon.

<sup>2</sup> John Simmons

<sup>3</sup> The Trades Councils of Dublin and Belfast sent two and three respectively, the Dublin printers and Irish bakers one each. One other Irish trade unionist attended as one of the delegates of an amalgamated union.

<sup>4</sup> The decision was made only by the casting vote of the Chairman. It is not clear what attitude the Irish member took.

ways    Thenceforth Ireland virtually ceased to exist for the Trades Union Congress. The handful of Irish trade unionists who attended subsequent Congresses did so at the pleasure of cross-Channel executives. No Irish trade union was financially strong enough to defray the cost of consistent representation. The two powerful Trades Councils were debarred. The independent participation of Irish trade unionists in the deliberations of the British "Parliament of Labour" was at an end. The attendance in 1896 and 1897 of a delegate from the Belfast painters was exceptional and for the sole purpose of inducing Congress to call a halt on the activity of the Amalgamated Painters. This latter society, anxious to extend its organisation to Ireland, was seeking, as a preliminary step, to absorb the membership of the local painters' union. Finding that body recalcitrant, the amalgamated set itself to compass the ruin of the local union. The delegate of the Belfast painters having put the Standing Orders Committee in possession of proofs that the amalgamated had authorised "blacklegging" and undercutting of established wage-scales, the Committee recommended to Congress the expulsion of the Amalgamated's delegate. However, Congress, many of whose constituent unions were engaged in similar practices, was inclined to temporise. The Amalgamated's delegate, speaking in his own defence, evoked much sympathy by his statement that the Belfast union exacted an entry fee of £3 from members of his society. In the end "the sentence of expulsion was passed amid many cries of 'Shame'".<sup>1</sup>

Though a few Irish societies, such as the Belfast Operative House Painters, the Dublin Metropolitan House and Ship Painters, and the Dublin Typographical Provident

<sup>1</sup> For an account of a similar attempt to ruin the Dublin Metropolitan Painters' Society, see *Sinn Féin*, Feb. 20, 1909. For a sympathetic account of the Dublin printers and of their struggle for the maintenance of their independence, cf. *ibid.*, Mar. 30, 1907, and Dec. 19, 1908.

Society fought desperately to preserve their independence, the majority of the Irish trade-union leaders of the old school were firm believers in the value of amalgamation with British societies. Despite the fulminations of Arthur Griffith and his ardent apostles, the Trades Councils of Dublin and Cork, no less than that of Belfast, persisted in recommending to their affiliated societies amalgamation with their kindred British associations. When in 1907 the Irish Congress was urged by the *Cumann na nGaedheal* to form an Irish Federation of Trade Unions, the component societies in which should have seceded from the amalgamateds, that body endorsed its Parliamentary Committee's emphatic rejection of the suggestion<sup>1</sup>. Only the year before the Irish Congress had by a three-to-one vote resolved to recommend affiliation with the General Federation of Trades Unions rather than attempt to form a distinct Irish organisation. The consensus of opinion was that Irish members of amalgamated unions received in strike pay and in benefits of various sorts many times the amount of their contributions to the cross-Channel exchequers.

The executives of amalgamated unions with Irish branches—or hopes of Irish branches—made the utmost possible use of this prevailing sentiment among Irish trade unionists and fostered it by every means in their power. Many of them, not content with representation of their Irish branches, sent representatives of their Executives to attend the Irish Congresses. In 1898 the attempt to use the ponderous British Trades Union Congress to further their propaganda in Ireland was renewed; it was proposed that a fraternal delegate should be sent to the Irish Congress. Congress, however, was not minded to put itself to any expense for such an object. The resolution was attacked as “one of the most mischievous on the agenda”:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Report of Annual Irish Trades Union Congress.

What they wanted was consolidation, and not the diffusion of labour interests. They had now a Scotch and an Irish Trades Union Congress, and they were threatened with a similar organisation for Wales. At each of these Congresses certain grievances were discussed, not one of which could not be discussed at the British Trades Union Congress, where they could have a better chance of being ventilated and remedied. All who had grievances to ventilate should be able to afford the cost of sending a delegate to this Congress. If they noted the *personnel* of the Irish and Scotch Congresses it would be found that the majority were not eligible to attend the British Congress under the present standing orders. He trusted the Congress would not stultify itself by officially recognising either of those bodies <sup>1</sup>

In 1900, however, Congress came perilously near to the dreaded stultification. In acknowledging receipt of some resolutions forwarded by the Irish Congress, the Secretary threw out the suggestion that the three Congresses consolidate their forces, a suggestion which with much dignity was rejected <sup>2</sup>

Within the British Congress itself there was a strong sentiment against diverting any of its energies to Irish propaganda. Such organisations as the Miners' Federation, which had no Irish branches and no reason to desire them, felt strongly that "the Irish Trade Unionists ought to bear their own responsibilities".<sup>3</sup> In the course of the decade following this last effort to win back the black sheep, Congress' interest in Ireland reached its nadir. Though Irish delegates of exceptional ability, such as William Walker, might figure conspicuously in Congress debates and even sit

<sup>1</sup> W. Mosses, Patternmakers, London. The resolution was lost by 54 to 104.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. correspondence printed in Report of Irish Trades Union Congress, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Whitfield, Bristol, 33rd Report, B. T. U. C., 1900, p. 58.



on the Standing Orders Committee, though the Parliamentary Committee might continue to pass on to Members of Parliament resolutions forwarded from the Irish Congress, the active work of propaganda and organisation was left to the unions having branches in Ireland

Politically British Labour had a much smaller stake in Ireland than industrially. At the organising Conference of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 it was decided to put membership on its National Administrative Council on a territorial basis; protest against the omission of Ireland was met by the explanation that

the Committee did not wish it to be inferred that they wished to do any injustice to Ireland. But their party had no existence in that country. It was true that they were led to believe that there was a very small branch somewhere about Belfast, but it had not put itself in evidence. As soon as Ireland had a Labour Party it would be quite right to consider the matter of representation <sup>1</sup>

Although Belfast appears in the Directory of branches for 1894, and although the annual Conference was informed in 1896 that there were then three branches in Ireland, that country did not for many years "put itself in evidence" in the Socialist movement.

In consequence of the extension of the Local Government Act to Ireland in 1898 the "clearwitted Irish workers" achieved notable successes in elections to public bodies throughout the country. But even the hearty congratulations extended by the Conference of 1899 to "our Irish brethren" were qualified by recognition that gains for Labour were not *ipso facto* Socialist gains.<sup>2</sup> In 1903, to

<sup>1</sup>Mr Shaw Maxwell, London, Executive Council, I. L. P. *cf.* Report of I L P Conference, Bradford, 1893

<sup>2</sup>The results of the elections encouraged the Fabians to undertake a special propaganda in Ireland, with the blessing of the I. L. P.

be sure, Belfast branches reappear in the Directory of Branches; however, no delegates attended the annual Conferences and the new districting system adopted at Derby (1907) made no provision for Ireland. As J Ramsay MacDonald explained the following year "For our organising purposes Devon and Cornwall are added to Wales and Ireland as a part of Lancashire"<sup>1</sup> Only in 1908 and 1909 did the I. L. P. Conference squander any time on Irish matters; in those years Larkin attended as delegate of the Dublin branch and "voiced the grievances of Ireland". His vehemence led MacDonald to voice the opinion of the Conference: "It is a little provocative, but we must take no notice of it."<sup>2</sup> From 1910 onward Ireland was forgotten; the woes of Ceylon loomed so large as completely to obscure the growth of national sentiment in Ireland.

The year 1903 marked also the first contact between the non-Socialist political labour movement and Ireland. The third Conference of the Labour Representation Committee was attended by three Belfast delegates, who later in the year attended the Irish Trades Union Congress, bringing with them J. Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie. The results were not altogether satisfactory. Keir Hardie uttered the high hope that

when the labour members came from Ireland, as they would come, they would work together outside all the political differences that had weakened their ranks in the past, realising that they had one common interest, which was greater than national feeling, greater than religious difference, the principle of seeking to uplift the people to whom they belonged, and to make their life more worth living than it had been in the past.

<sup>1</sup> In 1909 Ireland was raised to the rank of a separate division, but including also the Isle of Man, Westmoreland, and Cumberland. In 1910 this division was broken up and Ireland was appended to Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 16th I. L. P. Conference, Huddersfield, 1908, pp. 41-42.

Congress did adopt a resolution heartily recommending to Irish trade unions immediate affiliation with the L. R. C. "to promote the formation of independent labour representation in Ireland".<sup>1</sup> But threatening portents were not lacking. The Report of the Parliamentary Committee contained an appreciation of the work in the House of Commons of the Irish Parliamentary Party, coupled with a condemnation of the Irish Unionist members, who had not even acknowledged receipt of Congress' resolutions. Even more ominous than this partiality for the Nationalist Party was the rejection, with much heat, of a resolution in favour of secular education.<sup>2</sup> The stress laid by the British Labour Party on the importance of secular education augured ill for the success of its propaganda in Ireland. "There was no use", a Belfast printer remarked, "in putting a system of education before the public which they did not want. Any attempt to divide the schools from a certain amount of clerical control in Ireland would be simply beating the air. They could not accomplish such a thing. He was of the opinion that the fundamental truths of Christianity ought to be taught to the children to make them fit for life. Any other step would be backward."<sup>3</sup>

For the majority in Belfast, of course, these two objections were precisely the strong points of the Labour Representation Committee. The possibility of voting against a Unionist candidate without voting for a Nationalist was a welcome one. Secular education was more needed in Belfast, perhaps, than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Though the quality of education given in the schools operated by the priests was admittedly good, there were thou-

<sup>1</sup> Report of 10th Irish Congress, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> In vain the chief advocate of the resolution disclaimed any "desire to ostracise Catholics from their religion", *ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> C Darcus, *Typo As*, *ibid.*, p. 48.

sands of children "who never go to school, for the simple reason that there are no schools there to which they can go", "our children", Lord Carson has said, "do not want to be educated by the priests, or through the priests".<sup>1</sup> It was natural, therefore, that in Belfast practical effect should be given to Congress' recommendation. The Belfast Trades Council maintained its membership in the L. R. C., sending delegates regularly to the annual Conferences.<sup>2</sup> William Walker, the most forward spirit among Belfast trade unionists, repeatedly contested a Parliamentary constituency, with the sanction of the Committee.<sup>3</sup>

Belfast's activity was repaid in 1905 "by a clear majority of votes" in favour of that city as the next place of meeting. Though, in consequence of the general election, the Conference of 1906 was held in London, more societies than usual included a Belfast delegate among their representatives and "Belfast was decided upon by 177 votes to 86" as the place to be honoured by the next Conference. Moreover, at the instance of the Belfast Trades Council, the name of the Nationalist Party was inserted in the pledge to be taken by Labour M.P.'s as one of the parties with which they were not to identify themselves.<sup>4</sup> The Belfast Con-

<sup>1</sup> *Parl. Debates*, 5th Series, vol. 132, p. 713

<sup>2</sup> Several of the amalgamateds pursued with respect to the L. R. C. Conferences the same policy as has been noted in the case of the Irish Trades Union Congress. The Railway Servants (A. S. R. S.), Carpenters (A. S. C. J.), and Labourers (N. A. U. L.) regularly included a member, sometimes of a Dublin branch, more often of a Belfast branch, in their delegations.

<sup>3</sup> A Dublin trade-union official, W. Hudson, Secretary to the Irish branches of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, was also endorsed as a Parliamentary candidate by the L. R. C., but had to go to England to find a constituency willing to nominate him.

<sup>4</sup> James Sexton, Liverpool, Secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers, attempted to defend the record of the Irish Party, and a Belfast delegate [Glennon, United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers]

ference of 1907 was attended by 33 Irish trade unionists, only two of whom came from Dublin. With the exception of one delegate from each of two local societies<sup>1</sup> and the four delegates of the Belfast Trades Council, all the Irish delegates represented amalgamated unions. Walker was elected to the Executive Committee, and his Parliamentary candidature was again endorsed. Next year his third defeat was sympathetically chronicled:

At the time of the contest there was much political unsettlement in the North of Ireland caused by rumours that the Government intended introducing a Home Rule Bill and this seriously influenced the polling of a straight labour vote, and drew out a maximum support for the Unionist candidate.

The Home Rule question continued to be a stumbling-block in the way of the political cooperation of Irish and British Labour. Though the Irish Trades Union Congress continued to pass its annual resolution in favour of the affiliation of Irish trade unions with the Labour Representation Committee, the powerful Dublin Trades Council and such independent trade unions as survived in Ireland consistently omitted to send delegates to Labour Party Conferences. The conviction that the Irish Party was an adequate mouthpiece held sway in Nationalist Ireland. The Parliamentary Committee of the Irish Trades Congress repeatedly had occasion to refer to the energetic support given by the Nationalist Party in Parliament to legislative measures in the interest of Irish workers. On the other hand, the Labour

strongly opposed the "absurd and ridiculous" proposition, especially since at the recent general election "the Belfast Trades Council by resolution supported at least one Nationalist candidate in the City of Belfast".

<sup>1</sup> The Belfast butchers and bakers; these two societies continued their affiliation for several years, though unable to afford the luxury of a delegate to a cross-Channel Conference. The Londonderry glass-bottle makers had done likewise from 1903 to 1905.

Party, which had not yet committed itself to Home Rule and had not yet established a close working understanding with the Irish Party, resented the obstinacy of the Irish trade unionists. "In the last resort", said Keir Hardie in his presidential address at the Southport Conference in 1910, "the claims of the Irish people can only be won by the working class of Great Britain rallying to their support, and it does not appear to me that this is likely to be hastened by the heads of the Irish organisation this side the Channel using their power to bludgeon down Labour candidates in every case in which the Liberals think fit to oppose them."

The satisfaction of the amalgamateds' executives over the rate at which the absorption of the Irish workers was proceeding received a succession of rude jolts when the "new unionism" raised its head in Ireland. The consternation this phenomenon produced in that country has been noted in another connection. In England, too, the executives were dismayed at the prospect of being called on to spend large sums in the effort to raise to British standards a working class in which they had made it their business to inculcate contentment and the advantages of committing their affairs to the guidance of experienced cross-Channel executives. James Sexton, Secretary of the society immediately affected, disowned the offending organiser. Other executives instituted a more careful watch over the actions and aspirations of their Irish membership. An alarming tendency was abroad in Ireland to confound political and industrial ideals. Resolutions in favour of forming an independent Irish Labour Party were being annually introduced at Irish Trades Union Congresses, though regularly defeated, Separatist feeling was increasing.<sup>1</sup> In 1910 P. T. Daly, renowned for his Sinn Fein sympathies, was elected Secretary of the Con-

<sup>1</sup> In 1910 the vote was 39-18; in 1911 the vote was 32-29.

gress.<sup>1</sup> In connection with the inadequate support given to the Irish rail strike of 1911, only a few months after the Irish railwaymen had been called out in support of the cross-Channel rail strike, much disaffection had been manifested by many Irish trade unionists who had theretofore been devoted adherents of the policy of amalgamation.

The British Trades Union Congress was set moving in the direction indicated by the passage at the opening of this chapter. In his presidential address at the Newport Congress (1912) Will Thorne expressed the hope "that with the passing of the [Home Rule] Bill into law we shall see an end to that bitter feeling which has existed between the English and Irish races,<sup>2</sup> . . . I hope I am voicing the sentiments of all delegates at Congress when I say that we desire to see Ireland given the fullest form of social self-government, so that the Irish people can have the fullest opportunity to develop their own natural resources and work out their own economic and industrial salvation". As one of the delegates remarked in moving thanks, "I hope that, when Home Rule is granted, the Irish people will direct their attention more to industrial affairs in their own country rather than to political subjects". Although the amal-

<sup>1</sup> It was on this occasion that Mr. McCarron announced his intention to withdraw from the work of the Congress in future years: "He felt the election of Mr. Daly to that position, because being a consistent man, Mr. Daly would not change his spots or his policy, and therefore would not be prepared to carry out the resolutions of that Congress so far as conveying them to the British House of Commons." Daly interrupted to say that Mr. McCarron was "misinformed". Cf 17th Report, I T. U. C., p 64.

<sup>2</sup> "The Bill is being bitterly opposed by the Tory Party, and not only are they opposing the Bill in the House of Commons, but some of the leaders are inciting the Ulster people to open rebellion. I deliberately charge these men with being responsible for the brutal and cowardly attacks made upon the Catholic Trade Unionists and Socialists in the Belfast shipyards some few weeks ago."

gamateds, under pressure of their Irish locals, carried a resolution for the extension of Medical Benefits to Ireland, another resolution demanded that trade unions be treated as entities under the National (Health) Insurance Act of 1911; the amalgamateds had no desire to permit fiscal autonomy of any nature to their Irish branches<sup>1</sup>

The policy of "kicks with kindness" which had "succeeded" under Balfour's guidance was unconsciously followed by British Labour. The Trades Union Congress, which thirty years before had recognised that Ireland was governed "by coercion after coercion", had fallen back upon an identical policy. The executives of amalgamated unions held the purse-strings and intended to control the activity of their Irish members. But, as usual, British leaders had too long ignored developments in Ireland. Their neglect of the Irish Congress expedited its capture by the insurrectionary elements in Irish trade unionism. The domination of the amalgamateds over the proceedings of that august body was terminated by the Dublin lock-out of 1913-14. Crippled though it was by that desperate struggle, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union assumed the leadership and ultimately the hegemony of the Irish Labour Movement.

Notwithstanding the financial and moral assistance given to the Dublin workers in those bitter months of 1913, both by the Trades Union Congress and by the Labour Party,

<sup>1</sup> At the 19th Annual Trades Union Congress (Clonmel, 1912) a contrary resolution was carried by a vote of 37-17. The Chairman (M. J. O'Lehane) "said the resolution before them was, perhaps, the most important to be discussed at the Congress because it contained the very principles for which they had been fighting all along. . . The big unions in England were determined to hold the administration of the Act" Cf. Report, p. 44. At the same Congress a resolution (moved by Larkin), "That this Irish Trades Congress extends to the Transport Workers in the dispute within the London area our moral, and, if necessary our material support, and wish them success" was "carried with acclamation", *ibid.*, p. 69.



the relations between Irish and British Labour did not improve. That British assistance was thankfully acknowledged by the Irish Congress of 1914, while the British Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party confined their accounts of the dispute to self-gratulation and mutual admiration, with honourable mention for the *Daily Citizen* and the Cooperative Wholesale Society, is not without significance. Ignoring the fact that the Irish Congress had at last been brought to a definitive repudiation of the Irish Parliamentary Party as its mouthpiece and had set itself to the task of organising an independent Irish Labour Party, the British Parliamentary Labour Party, influenced by strategical considerations, had established an *entente cordiale* with the Nationalists; resolutions forwarded from the Irish Congress were referred to the Irish Party for endorsement before receiving the attention of the Labour Party.

Both on the British side and on the Irish it was felt desirable to effect some accommodation between the new Irish Labour Party and the British. In 1913 both the British Conference and the Irish Congress instructed their Executives to conduct negotiations for a better understanding. A meeting was accordingly arranged and held in London on July 15, at which the Irish deputation presented a long list of grievances in respect to the action or inaction of the Parliamentary Labour Party and "protested against the Party taking counsel with the Irish Nationalist Party on Labour matters or on questions affecting the workers in Ireland over the heads of the representatives of the Irish Trades Congress", whereas "these very men whom [they] accused the Party of consulting were the same men whom in Ireland they had to fight as amongst their bitterest enemies". The celerity with which Irish Labour had turned its back on the Irish Party had been too great for their British patrons "Mr. J. R. MacDonald, M.P., said the

remarks of the Irish Delegation surprised him very much." Mr. Henderson, M.P., could see "no justification" for the Irish attitude. P. T. Daly replied hotly. Keir Hardie, M.P., soothed the tumult by remarking that "they would be better employed than in recrimination", and said "it was quite evident they were not in such close relationship to each other as they should be". On the Irish side it was desired to give a special form to this desiderated close relationship: "They were in grave difficulty with regard to funds, and [their Parliamentary] Committee had instructed [them] to request that monies paid in Ireland by members of International Unions should be handed over to the Irish Labour Party." A further conference was arranged to consider this proposal, and this "very frank and profitable interchange of views" was concluded<sup>1</sup>

The Second Conference was held in Dublin on September 6; the Labour Party was represented by Messrs Roberts and Henderson. Under cover of fresh criticism that the Parliamentary Labour Party, despite the "amicable" relations that had existed between it and the Irish Parliamentary Committee, "had been too much inclined to listen to the voice of the Irish Nationalists", the Irish representatives urged that "they in Ireland were entitled to some part of the 1s per year contributed by the Irish membership" of amalgamated unions for political purposes. Though Mr. Roberts was inclined to see in the 25 per cent retained by branches of some unions for local labour representation purposes a possible precedent, Mr. Henderson set his face determinedly against any discussion of financial relations until the relationship of the two Labour Parties had been settled. Criticism of the Parliamentary Labour Party he

<sup>1</sup> A full report of these negotiations is printed in the Report of 21st Annual Irish Trades Union Congress, pp. 1-14; see also discussion, *ibid.*, pp. 39-42.

equally declined to discuss, as he and his colleague represented the Labour Party, not the Parliamentary Party. What they did want to know was what were to be the relations between the Irish Labour Party and the English Party, and what attitude the Irish Labour Members remaining at Westminster would assume to the Parliamentary Labour Party: "then the question of finance would be more easily settled". On being assured that "it was proposed to set up an Irish Labour Party as a separate and distinct Party from the National Labour Party, but that in matters concerning the workers of the United Kingdom as a whole they would co-operate with the National Labour Party", Mr. Henderson discovered that as far as the Irish Labour Party was concerned, "there was no idea of bringing in Socialist bodies". Though Socialist bodies hardly existed in Ireland, Mr. Henderson found here an insuperable obstacle: "Until the Irish Constitution and the composition of the Irish Party were similar to the British there could be no claim on the fees paid to the British Party or any connection with it"

The negotiations were brought to a close by an ultimatum from Mr. Henderson, who

put two alternative proposals—(1) the Irish scheme to build up a purely Irish Party, primarily for the purpose of sending members to the Irish Parliament, proceeding on Irish lines and leaving the British Movement alone, claiming none of the British Party's money; (2) the formation of a Party that was going to work with the British Labour Party on the same lines as the British Party, working through the Parliamentary Committee of the Irish Congress, but embracing all sections of the Irish movement, having its own Irish Conference and also sending representatives to the British Conference.

As the Irish representatives declined his proffered mess of

pottage, Mr Henderson washed his hands of the whole sordid business. Nor could he be persuaded to promise that "the Labour Party in Parliament should consult the Irish Labour Movement as to the possible results of voting one way or another in the House of Commons", as "the position in Parliament was frequently a difficult one, particularly when they had to interpret the wishes of the Irish democracy".

The project of a Scotch Labour Party, financed and controlled by the English Party, was ratified by the Glasgow Conference of the Labour Party (January, 1914), though not without opposition to the financial provisions. The report of the negotiations with the Irish Labour Party, however, was passed over in silence. The outrageous demand for a portion of the Parliamentary levy collected from Irish trade unionists was not to be stomached; to maintain that some of "the British Party's money" should be diverted to further the special interests of those who paid the money was a pretention that could best be met by dignified silence. The Irish Labour Party, the constitution of which was adopted by the Dublin Congress in June, 1914, was left to shift for itself, apparently in the confident expectation that poverty would sooner or later drive it to seek an accommodation with the English Party in a more amenable spirit. A desperate effort on the part of the Irish Parliamentary Committee to effect the intervention of the English Party to secure more adequate representation of urban areas under the Home Rule Bill, to prevent the exclusion of Ulster, and to attain several other minor ends, had been made a month earlier. On May 9, an Irish deputation interviewed Ramsay MacDonald and other officers of the Party in the House of Commons. The tenor of MacDonald's answer implied that the wishes of Irish Labour must be subordinated to the exigencies of the entente with Redmond's Party; no more

definite promise was forthcoming than that "the views of the Irish deputation would be considered by his Party".<sup>1</sup>

The European war and its reverberations in Ireland still further muddled the relations of British and Irish Labour. Due to the introspective preoccupation of British Labour, contacts between the two movements were rare. Thus, in 1916 the Irish Congress authorised the appointment of fraternal delegates to the Birmingham Trades Union Congress. However, Mr. Bowerman, Secretary of the British Congress, wrote to say "that owing to the list of invitations being already a lengthy one and the great amount of business to be gone through it would not be convenient to accept [the] delegation".<sup>2</sup> The Birmingham Congress does not seem to have been aware that the Irish even desired to fraternise with them. The arrest of a number of leading Irish trade unionists after Easter Week (1916) was, however, protested by the British Labour Party and by the Trades Union Congress; such a precedent was obviously not to be tolerated.

The full significance of Easter Week was completely wasted on British Labour. The Rising had not sufficed to shed the faintest glimmer of new light on the position in Ireland. At the Trades Union Congress in September, 1916, only one delegate ventured to "think of recent events in Ireland", and even his interest centred in citing "Shehan Skeffington's [*sic*] fate" as a proof that "militarism is the same, whether in Germany or any other country".<sup>3</sup> At the Labour Party Conference in January, 1917, the Parliamentary Report made only bald mention of "the calamitous

<sup>1</sup> 21st Annual Report, I. T. U. C., *op. cit*

<sup>2</sup> Report of the 23rd Annual Meeting, I L. P. & T. U. C., Derry, 1917, p. 33 (N. E. report)

<sup>3</sup> Ammon, Fawcett Association, London; Report of 48th Annual Congress, p. 215.

outbreak in Ireland" which had made the outlook "blacker than ever". Of Connolly and his fate there was not a mention; the Citizen Army was ignored. Blinded by the power its independent support of the Government gave the Irish Party in Parliament<sup>1</sup> and bursting from "sympathy with the Nationalist Party in the repeated postponement of plans intended to realise their national aims",<sup>2</sup> the Labour Party failed to realise that in Ireland the prestige of the Redmondites was fast ebbing. "It was not necessary", Arthur Henderson wrote on December 18, 1917, to the Secretary of the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party,

to restate your attitude to the Nationalist Party as we have known it for many years . . . With all the desire in the world to assist you it is unfortunate that as yet no Labour representative has been elected, so as to prove that the Nationalist Members no longer represent the working classes. The Nationalist Party cannot be ignored so long as they are in the House of Commons, and I must say we have no intention of doing other than continue to work with them, as we have done, until the working classes of Ireland send Labour Members to Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

The energetic propaganda of the Irish Labour Party, culminating in the manifesto of April 24, 1918, addressed "To the Organised Workers of England, Scotland and Wales", at last convinced the Labour Party that the Government's

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the doubts expressed in Anderson's presidential address at the Bristol Conference of the Labour Party (January 1916) as to "military necessity in respect of a [Conscription] Bill which leaves out Ireland, apparently on the ground that it is objected to by an Irish party which combines independent support of the Government in respect of the war, with the preservation of its own political identity free from Coalitions".

<sup>2</sup> Party resolution reported in Report of 16th Annual Conference (Manchester, 1917), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> For the complete correspondence see Report of 24th Annual Irish Congress (Waterford, 1918), pp. 28-36.

exclusion of Ireland from the Conscription Act was due to deeper causes than the opposition of the Irish Party in Parliament. "If Conscription be enforced," the manifesto concluded, "we warn you, comrades and friends of liberty, that massacre and rapine will follow. You will be accomplices in the crime, history will bring the guilt home to you unless you take effective steps to prevent the Order in Council being issued."<sup>1</sup> Persuaded that Great Britain was "faced with the most menacing situation since the outbreak of war", the Parliamentary Committee of the British Trades Union Congress and the Executive of the Labour Party jointly issued "An Appeal to the Government". In the words of this appeal,

the attempt to enforce conscription will mean not merely the shedding of the blood of thousands of Irishmen and Englishmen and Scotsmen, too; but also the maintenance of a huge permanent army of occupation in Ireland. The tragedy cannot be merely local or confined to Ireland; . . . The consequence of exasperating the Irish people at such a moment might . . . so reduce the food supplies of Great Britain as to convert what is already a serious situation into a critical or calamitous one.<sup>2</sup>

Though at this juncture the Labour Party, the Irish Labour Party, and the Irish Parliamentary Party—and incidentally, metamorphosed Sinn Féin—found themselves joining hands in resistance to the Government, there ensued no

<sup>1</sup> For the full text see Report of 24th Congress (Waterford, 1918), pp 43-44

<sup>2</sup> Principle, of course, lent its cloak to expediency "We appeal to [the Government] on grounds of principle and of expediency alike not to violate the national conscience, and not to jeopardise the whole future of this country and its Allies and their success in the war, by imposing conscription upon a nation without its own consent, and in face of this certainty of the most determined and united opposition." For the full text see Report of 24th Irish Congress, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

union of hearts    The Irish Party was in a position to render assistance in Parliament to the Labour Party; the Irish Labour Party was not. Under the circumstances there could be no question of paying heed to the oft-reiterated complaints of Irish Labour against the Nationalist Party. The latter remained the oracle by whose utterances the framing of Home Rule resolutions was guided. At the second London Conference of the Labour Party (June, 1918) a resolution for a qualified right of Irish self-determination and for a Home Rule Bill on the lines indicated in the proceedings of the Irish Convention was adopted in preference to an amendment omitting the qualifications; Sylvia Pankhurst's appeal to avoid creating bad blood between the Irish and British Labour Parties by passing the original draft resolution proved unavailing against Jack Jones' rough pragmatism. The Trades Union Congress of the same year, though passing a complicated resolution demanding Irish "self-determination, consistent with democratic principles and unity", took care to embody in even this temperate demand the platitude that "capitalists and economic exploitation being the same in all lands, the workers of Ireland are equally with ourselves under capitalistic and employers' economic exploitation" and the affirmation that "we regret and protest against any religious or racial sidetracking of economic and political questions, which have undermined, and are undermining, working-class unity".

The disappearance, at the end of 1918, of the Irish Nationalist Party as a factor in British politics and the recognition by the International Labour and Socialist Conference at Berne, in February, 1919, of the right of the delegates of the Irish Labour Party to sit as representatives of a distinct nation, left the British Labour Party floundering. The Southport Conference in June, 1919, had before it no resolution on the Irish question; the report of the Parliamentary



Party confessed with respect to its motion in Parliament of regret and concern for the conditions existing in Ireland that the Party had carefully drafted this motion in order to get the maximum support, and, therefore, refrained from including in it any definite statement as to the best method of settling the Irish question.

Concern at the way Irish sentiment was developing was heightened by the Stockport election in March, 1920. The nomination for this vacancy of William O'Brien, Secretary of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, then a prisoner in Wormwood Scrubbs, was due to local Irish dissatisfaction with the answers given by the Executive of the British Labour Party to questions as to their views upon the position in Ireland. Although the Irish Executive "announced publicly that Alderman O'Brien's candidature was not with its consent and was decided upon by the local Irish workers without consultation with this Executive", the Executive could not refrain from adding that "the contest was an effective piece of propaganda work".<sup>1</sup>

Still more alarming tendencies were evinced among Irish workers on the Tyne and the Clyde. "It was quite evident", Thomas Johnson had informed the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Irish Congress (August, 1919), "that there was a widespread desire on the part of workers of Irish descent and birth in those districts to organise and to have some connection with the movement in Ireland". Inasmuch as the Irish Executive was "quite willing and ready to grant the people of Great Britain, the citizens of that country, self-determination", it rather discountenanced "proposals from these disaffected Irish workers that they should form cross-Channel branches of the Irish Labour Party". However, the Executive did "want them to organise them-

<sup>1</sup> Report of 26th Irish Congress (Cork, 1920), p. 21.

selves in groups, bring all their influence to bear upon the national and local labour organisations in Great Britain, and keep in close touch with [the Executive's] work in Ireland". The Tyneside and Clydeside Irish workers eagerly embraced this suggestion, intent on using "their opportunities to force their British fellow-workers to face boldly the implications of their professed love of liberty and their doctrine of self-determination". The most astute of the Irish leaders, Thomas Johnson, "thought there was the making of a very powerful movement that would help the British Labour Party to a more militant policy, industrially and politically, and at the same time force the British Labour Party, local and national, to face this issue: that their protestations on behalf of self-determination must have application in respect to Ireland". The Irish Executive was "trying to get into touch with Lancashire and South Wales to encourage similar organisations of Irish workmen". The British Labour Party did not dare to offer any opposition to what a few years before they would have attacked as trespassing. On the contrary, the Executive deemed it prudent to decline an application for affiliation made by the resuscitated Belfast Labour Party, though the Executive did not deem it prudent to inform the annual Conference of the fact.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was there long to wait before the militancy and professed love of liberty of post-war British Labour were put to the test. The crisis was precipitated by the Irish membership of the greatest of the amalgamateds, the National Union of Railwaymen. This union had so far yielded to Irish national sentiment as to agree to the retention by the Irish Council "for the furtherance of the political objects in Ireland" of such portion of the political fund as would

<sup>1</sup> Report of 25th Irish Congress (Drogheda, 1919) p. 56 (N. E. report) and pp. 69-73 (discussion).

otherwise be remitted to Head Office in Unity House, London; furthermore Parliamentary "candidates in Ireland adopted in accordance with this rule must be and remain bona-fide members of the Union, and, if elected, accept the conditions of the Irish Labour Party".<sup>1</sup> J. H. Thomas himself, General Secretary of the N. U. R., was already coming to the fore as an earnest advocate of Dominion Home Rule. At a special meeting of the Executive Committee on May 20, 1920, a resolution was unanimously adopted instructing Mr Thomas "to take steps to bring about a full delegate meeting of the Triple Alliance at the earliest possible moment, with a view to that body formulating proposals which will end the present unhappy situation".<sup>2</sup>

At this same meeting of May 20th the Executive Committee decided to issue instructions to the members of the Union "to refuse to handle any material which is intended to assist Poland against the Russian people". That same afternoon "a vessel arrived in the Port of Dublin . . . conveying munitions for the military, and when the dockers and cranemen understood the nature of the cargo they refused, according to the Secretary of the Irish Transport Workers' Union, to discharge the vessel".<sup>3</sup> This "Pacific Protest against Galloperism"<sup>4</sup> was duplicated at Dun Laoghaire (late Kingstown). The dockers were replaced with soldiers, and the cargoes were discharged. But at this point

<sup>1</sup> Rules of the National Union of Railwaymen—July, 1923. Rule XXI, sections 2 and 9 (e).

<sup>2</sup> N. U. R. Decision 339 (1920). This and subsequent references to N. U. R. Decisions are taken from the quarterly reports of the National Union of Railwaymen, comprising the General Secretary's Report to and Decisions of Special Executive Committee Meetings, also Quarterly Meeting.

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Times*, May 21, 1920.

<sup>4</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, May 21, 1920; see issues of May 22, 24 and 27 for reports of subsequent developments.

Irish railwaymen decided to apply to their own country the principles laid down for Russia by their own executive. For three days an alleged "war train" stood immobile on the dock; only when the men's representatives had been allowed to examine the train and satisfy themselves that no munitions were aboard, did the trainmen resume their functions. The movement spread rapidly. At the North Wall, Dublin, members of the N. U. R. employed by the L. & N. W. Railway "refused to assist in the unloading of certain packages containing arms" from that company's ships, or to work at all under an armed guard. Over four hundred men were dismissed in consequence<sup>1</sup>

At a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the N. U. R., held on May 27 and 28, a motion to "call the attention of our members in Ireland" to the resolution on Ireland adopted a week earlier and "to inform them that a meeting of the Triple Alliance has been called for an early date to endeavour to find a solution for the Irish problem", in view of which circumstances the men were instructed to return to work, was flatly rejected by an overwhelming majority. As a substitute the Committee adopted an amendment:

That this E. C., having had brought to its notice the attitude of some of our Irish members towards the increasing militarist policy of the British Government, condemn the insincerity of the present House of Commons on the important question of self-determination of the Irish people. We desire to bring to the notice of our members that this E. C. has already decided to meet with other Trade Unions constituting the Triple Alliance in order to specially consider the present oppression of the Irish people. We would, however, point out to our members that at this stage this E. C. cannot be responsible for any action taken without their consent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of 26th Irish Congress (Cork, 1920), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> N. U. R. Decision 344 (1920).

Alarmed by the obvious fact that no action short of direct action could be of any value in this crisis, the Sub-Committee of the Triple Alliance came to the canny conclusion "that the position in Ireland is such as to warrant the consideration by the organised Trade Union movement as a whole" and preferred to the Parliamentary Committee "an urgent request that a special T. U. C. be convened at an early date in order that the attitude of British Labour towards the production and handling of munitions of war for Ireland and Poland may be determined".<sup>1</sup>

The Executive of the N. U. R. was thus compelled to settle its own line of policy at its regular Quarterly Meeting, held May 31 to June 9. A resolution was moved characterising the action of the Triple Alliance as "only a subterfuge to evade responsibility and waste time" and declaring that:

We desire to reaffirm our opinion that we are against war in principle, whether it is directed against the democracy of Ireland or any other nation, and under the circumstances direct our members not to handle men, guns, or munitions which are intended to be used against the Irish people.<sup>2</sup>

This unequivocal resolution was defeated and an amendment carried: in view of the danger involved in "the delay which must inevitably result from the decision to ask for a special meeting of the T. U. C.", the N. U. R. Executive instructed Thomas to arrange an interview between it and Lloyd George, "to discuss the question of our members handling munitions consigned to the Army and Police authorities". Nor could the Committee make up its mind "to intimate to the Government at our forthcoming inter-

<sup>1</sup> Report of General Secretary, N. U. R., to Quarterly Meeting, Movements Department

<sup>2</sup> The last sentence of this resolution suggested that the Prime Minister be asked "to have the army of occupation withdrawn from Ireland".

view that unless a solution is found to the Irish position this E. C. will be compelled to endorse the action of our members at North Wall"; the E. C. could only promise itself "to immediately consider the whole position after the interview with the representatives of the Government". Not even after the natural failure to accomplish anything by an interview with the "Welsh Wizard" could the E. C. be persuaded to commit itself to "the opinion that we are astounded and disgusted at the apathy of [this] Committee [i. e., the Sub-Committee of the Triple Alliance] in the face of a national emergency in refusing to call the Triple Alliance together" or to adopt the resolution that "we are compelled to call upon our members in this country and in Ireland to refuse to assist in the transport of men, munitions, guns and accessories, and decide to support our members who may be victimised in carrying out our instructions". Realising that "the situation is very serious and requires very careful consideration", the Executive contented itself with the decision to "call a conference of Irish branches" to meet the E. C. at Bristol on June 16 and with an appeal for "an early meeting of the British T. U. C. and also the Irish T. U. C. to fully consider the Irish question with a view of finding a bridge between the Irish people and the Government". "In the meantime we ask our members to resume work, in order to give an opportunity for the Labour Movement to act on their behalf."<sup>1</sup>

The Irish railwaymen, who had received no support from the British Labour Movement, not even a halfpenny from the exchequer of their own Union in aid of the men dismissed for their refusal to handle munitions, put themselves under the wing of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. The Executive of that organisation had taken advantage of the Southampton Conference of the Transport

<sup>1</sup> N. U. R. Decisions 407, 408, and 409 (1920).

Workers' Federation to put the position before the assembled representatives of that body, but had brought away nothing more substantial than Harry Gosling's pointed reminder that a special Trades Union Congress had been called to discuss the matter and that "they preferred to leave the question in abeyance until that Congress met". On June 9 the National Executive issued a statement to the Press calling upon "all who profess and call themselves Nationalists, Republicans, or Trade Unionists" to "support the men who are bearing the brunt" of the struggle and making an appeal for at least £1000 a week. Under the guidance of the Irish Labour Party Executive the railmen refrained from a general rank and file strike, throwing on the railway managers the onus of dismissing the men when they refused to work trains with munitions on board.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the Executive of the N. U. R., anxious "that the whole position may be approached at our Bristol Conference without prejudice" was endeavouring to get the men back to work. Thomas and two other Union officials were sent to Dublin on this futile mission. No less futile was the Bristol Conference itself; in a two-days' session no more adequate solution was reached than the decision to appoint a fresh deputation to wait upon Mr. Lloyd George in London and discuss with him "the momentous question of Dominion Home Rule".<sup>2</sup> The day following the close of this abortive Conference, the Irish Labour Party and

<sup>1</sup> Report of 26th Irish Congress, pp. 41-46 (N. E. Report) and pp. 114-118 (discussion).

<sup>2</sup> In fairness to Mr. Thomas and the N. U. R. it should be recognised that the delegates of the Ulster branches were bitterly opposed to the stand taken by the majority of the Irish delegates. "Thank God," the Irish Secretary of the N. U. R. subsequently exclaimed, "one thing did take place in Bristol at that conference, so far as the N. U. R. was concerned, and that was that we were able to cement our members, North and South, together." (26th Report, p. 115).

Trade Union Congress established a special "Munitions of War Fund" out of subscriptions to which the victimised members of the N. U. R. and other unions affected were maintained. Close on £120,000 passed through the hands of the National Executive on this account. "The Disbursements, in the way of Victimization Pay, were in nearly all cases made payable to the Secretary of the local Union concerned, . . . . The Administration Expenses of the fund came to £908:14:2. . . . This low cost reflects the highest credit upon those concerned with the administration of the Fund."<sup>1</sup>

Under the circumstances the Annual General Meeting of the N. U. R. held at Belfast, July 5 to 10, passed its troubles over in silence, except for a resolution at the end of the agenda approving of the action of the E. C. in calling the Bristol Conference, adding that Congress

deplores the serious division of opinion and realises that without complete unity amongst the working classes, who should not allow either religious or political differences to prevent their emancipation—which can only be achieved through a great international brotherhood the world over—no satisfactory progress can be made.<sup>2</sup>

At the Special Trades Union Congress, which met in London on July 13, the N. U. R. had no new suggestion to offer. Its spokesmen moved and seconded a resolution, which was carried by a very narrow majority, demanding

<sup>1</sup> Report of D. O'Connor & Co., Chartered Accountants, Auditors, Report of 27th Irish Congress (Dublin, 1921), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Agenda and Decisions of the Annual General Meeting (1920), 59 (a); compare the resolution on Russia, *ibid.*, 59 (d). "That this Congress emphatically protests against the Government's policy with regard to Russia, and demands that intervention, either in a direct or indirect manner, immediately cease, and in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles Russia be allowed without coercion of any kind to determine its own form of government."



a truce and the establishment of "an Irish Parliament, with full Dominion Powers in all Irish affairs, with adequate protection for the interests of minorities". The spokesman of the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen proposed as an addendum that

In the event of the Irish people refusing to adopt the principle of the suggestion in this resolution, and the Government being willing to do so, this Congress and its affiliated unions shall take no further action with regard to Irish political problems; and if the Irish people being willing, the Government refuses to act, an immediate ballot be taken of the members of affiliated unions as to a general strike to compel the withdrawal of troops from Ireland.

Whether shocked at the prospect of inaction in the one case or terrified by the suggestion of action in the other case, the addendum was lost by an overwhelming majority. On the other hand, a proposal to substitute for the endorsement of Dominion Home Rule a demand for "recognition by the Government, and immediate application of the right of the Irish people themselves to determine the form of government they desire" was defeated by a larger majority, and on a heavier poll, than the N. U. R. resolution could command. The Trades Union Congress felt that the time had come to get rid of further responsibility for Irish disturbances. As the Triple Alliance had shifted the initiative to the Trades Union Congress, so Congress passed it on to its affiliated organisations. By a 3 to 2 vote the Special Congress adopted a resolution of protest against the continued military occupation of Ireland, concluding: "We recommend a general down-tools policy, and call on all the Trade Unions here represented to carry out this policy, each according to its own constitution, by taking a ballot of its members or otherwise"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Special Congress is included in the Parliamentary Com-

How little possibility there was of the adoption of such a policy is clearly illustrated by a passage from the report of the General Secretary of the N. U. R. to a special meeting late in September.

A large number of claims [runs this report under the heading "Irish Situation and Suspension and Donation Benefit"] have been submitted to me, and in accordance with the rule, I have dealt with them as follows:—

(a) To those members who have been dismissed for having refused to handle munitions or work trains conveying munitions, armed soldiers and policemen, no benefit has been allowed.

(b) To those members who have been suspended for having refused to do the work of the men virtually on strike, suspension benefit has been granted.

(c) To men dismissed owing to the absence of work resulting from the strike, donation pay has been granted.<sup>1</sup>

To the end the E. C. of the N. U. R. firmly refused to authorise the action of its members in Ireland, notwithstanding the recommendation of the Trades Union Congress. Despite their Executive's strict interpretation of the Union rules, the Irish railwaymen persisted for some months in their defiance of British military power; in their resistance they continued to command the wholehearted support of the Irish Labour Movement, reaffirmed at a Special Conference of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress on November 16.<sup>2</sup> As the number of dismissed railwaymen increased, however, Ireland was faced with the cessation of

mittee's Report to the 52nd British Trades Union Congress (Portsmouth, 1920). The vote on the N. U. R. resolution was 1,935,000 to 1,759,000, on the amendment 1,916,000 to 2,676,000. The vote on the final resolution was 2,670,000 to 1,636,000.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. General Secretary's Report to Special Meeting on Sept. 30, 1920 and Decision 729 (1920).

Cf. Report of 27th Irish Congress (Dublin, 1921), pp. 49-63.

rail transportation. The consequent threat to Ireland's food supply, coupled with the extension of martial law and the intensification of the Terror, emphasised by the burning of Cork, persuaded the National Executive that the time had come to abandon their position and change their tactics. On December 14, the officers of the Irish Labour Party issued a statement advising the railwaymen and dockers "to offer to carry everything that the British Military Authorities were willing to risk on the trains"<sup>1</sup> A week later "a representative conference" of the Irish members of the N. U. R., attended by four representatives of the E. C., deemed it "advisable to resume . . . normal working at once, without discrimination as to the class of traffic tendered and conveyed, providing there is no victimisation or prejudice inflicted upon any of our members as a result of any action taken by them in connection with their refusal to carry munitions or armed forces". Armed with this resolution, Mr. Thomas arranged with the Minister of Transport an agreement for resumption of work and reinstatement of the men on the stipulated conditions. When it transpired that the Great Northern Railway was insisting that as a condition of reinstatement its men sign "a declaration which contains a provision affecting their Pension Fund", the E. C. instructed the men "that under no circumstances must they sign this form" and authorised a payment of fifty shillings a week to each man thus kept from his work.<sup>2</sup>

This whole episode, which so clearly illustrates the unwillingness of British Labour to let itself be put to either trouble or expense on behalf of Irish Labour, was brought to a close by the decision of Mr. Thomas' Executive, in March, 1921,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, pp 6-13 (N. E. report) and pp 86-90 (discussion).

<sup>2</sup> Cf N. U. R. Decisions 938-941 (1920), taken at Quarterly Meeting, Dec. 6-11 and 13-16; Decisions 959-960 (1920), taken at Special Meeting, Dec 23-4, Report of General Secretary to Special E. C Meeting, Jan. 12, 1921, and Decisions 35-37 (1921), taken at this meeting.

to make a grant, a sum of £3 per member, to those members who were dismissed for refusing to carry munitions, this not to apply to those of our members who have been granted Donation Benefit. We decide to point out to our Irish members that, owing to our present financial liabilities, we regret that we are unable to make a more substantial grant.<sup>1</sup>

As a study in contrasts should be noted the prompt action of the Irish National Executive at the time of the British coal dispute:

We decided that cargoes of coal coming from America or Belgian [*sic*] to Irish ports for normal Irish purposes should be discharged, but that we should not allow Irish ports to be used as coaling stations where American or Belgian coal could be discharged and then reshipped into ocean going steamers as bunker coal.

We are pleased to acknowledge that the views and decision of your Executive on this matter were quite acceptable to both Mr. Hodges, as representing the Miners' Federation, and Messrs. Gosling and Williams, as representing the National Transport Workers' Federation. Our deputation readily gave an assurance to the latter gentlemen that in the case of a coal steamer being refused discharge at a British port and being diverted to an Irish port, that she would not be discharged at an Irish port if notification were received from the officials of the British Federation.<sup>2</sup>

While the N. U. R. was in the midst of its difficulties emanating from Dublin, troubles of an opposite nature came

<sup>1</sup> N. U. R. Decision 161 (1921). Had the N. U. R. paid £3 to every member of its Irish branches, its total expenditure would have been less than half of the amount disbursed by the Irish Labour Party to the victims of the strike. For the men dismissed at the beginning of the struggle, a sum of £3 works out at less than 2s a week.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 27th Irish Congress (Dublin, 1921), p. 22.

from the opposite pole of Ireland. The Belfast expulsions had begun in the shipyards in July, 1920. The infection reached the Belfast railwaymen early in September. The N. U. R., which only two months before had in that very city unanimously urged upon the working classes that they "should not allow either religious or political differences to prevent their emancipation", now found itself face to face with a repudiation of that doctrine by a section of its own members. But the repudiation of its principles was less embarrassing to the Executive Committee than had been the application of other of its principles by another section of its members. At the same Special Meeting of September 7 and 8 that endorsed the refusal of benefit to members dismissed for refusal to move munitions, the E. C. with similar unanimity adopted the following resolution:

This E. C. most emphatically condemns the action of a number of our members in Belfast in driving their fellow members of this union from their employment owing to their religious belief, and express our surprise and disgust that any employers of labour should be influenced by such methods. We instruct the General Secretary to demand the immediate reinstatement of those men, with full pay for time lost, also compensation for loss caused by the household effects of our members being destroyed. In the meantime our members be granted Donation Benefit pending satisfactory settlement.<sup>1</sup>

In this case the action of the insubordinate members imperilled the membership and finances of the Union. The vigorous language of the resolution did not imply any desire on the part of the Executive Committee to entangle itself in the intricacies of Belfast politics, a necessary preliminary to the elimination of the root causes of the difficulty. Only a few weeks earlier, the regular Quarterly Meeting of the

<sup>1</sup> N. U. R. Decision 730 (1920)

Executive had had before it a request from the Belfast Labour Party for financial assistance to permit them to carry on their work. The request was refused with an expression of regret that the Union's commitments were such as to prevent the E. C. from making any grant from the Political Fund.<sup>1</sup>

To Mr. Thomas, as president of the Trades Union Congress at Portsmouth (September, 1920), fell the task of introducing an emergency resolution submitted by the Standing Orders Committee. This "very important resolution", offered because, as the president put it, "in the anxiety to uphold the Union Jack in Belfast men are being prevented from working because of their religious and political opinions", merely instructed "the Parliamentary Committee immediately to call together the executives of the various Trade Unions affected by the recent disturbances in Belfast with a view to their taking a common line of action for the reinstatement of all Trade Unionists expelled from their work in the Belfast area". Amidst excitement provoked by the efforts of a delegate of the Shipwrights' Association to get a hearing for his plea that the solution be left to the workers of Belfast, the resolution was declared carried.<sup>2</sup>

Aware of the need for accurate information, the new "Parliamentary Committee appointed three of their number to go to Belfast in order that they might get into direct touch with the representatives of the unions whose members were affected, and also with the expelled men, or with anyone who could in any way contribute to a satisfactory settle-

<sup>1</sup> N. U. R. Decision 696 (1920)

<sup>2</sup> See this Report for an account of the personal observations in Belfast of a Manchester delegate of the Amalgamated Painters. On the passage of the resolution President Thomas announced "I am informed that there is a gentleman who has been given permission to collect for the workers of Belfast who have been thrown out of work. He is in or about the hall, and no doubt you will encounter him somewhere."

ment of the dispute" Assigning to these three categories those with whom this deputation discussed the situation, it appears that the principal interviews of the deputation, which arrived in Belfast on December 4, were with (1) the District Committee of the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades and of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Society,<sup>1</sup> (2) two committees of expelled workers,<sup>2</sup> and the Provisional Committee of the men expelled from the Joiners' Society, and (3) the managements of the two great shipbuilding firms,<sup>3</sup> the Lord Mayor of Belfast and his secretary, the Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland, and representatives of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and the Chamber of Commerce. At the contradictory views and statements of its informants the deputation was in blank dismay. Their report to the Parliamentary Committee of the British Trades Union Congress is a regretful but frank confession of unenlightened helplessness. "It should at once be recognised," begins the explanation of causes of the trouble,

that it is impossible to impartially judge the position in Belfast from any standpoint of conditions in England. The history and traditions of the people in Ireland in relation to political and religious questions find no parallel in this country. Moreover, in any consideration of the situation in Belfast due regard must be paid to the deplorable and chaotic condition of affairs in Ireland at the present time.

Deeply impressed by the solemn affirmation of the represen-

<sup>1</sup> "We also attended meetings of Trade Union branches, and had interviews with a number of responsible Trade Union officers, and with individual members of Trade Unions, both from inside and outside the various establishments."

<sup>2</sup> The Expelled Workers' Committee, A. E. U., and representatives of the Expelled Workers' Relief Committee.

<sup>3</sup> Messrs. Harland and Wolff Limited and Messrs. Workman, Clark and Company Limited.

tatives of the two great shipbuilding firms, "that they could not accept any political or religious test as a condition of employment in their yards",<sup>1</sup> the deputation was inclined to endorse their interpretation of the causes of the trouble. Though the deputation did go so far as to suggest to Harland and Wolff that they close their works altogether, they felt constrained to admit the cogency of the argument that the "maintenance of order" imposed "the necessity of keeping the men as fully employed as possible". The deputation was fully awake to the effect of the disturbance upon the trade of Belfast "The big trading houses in the City are being adversely affected by the boycott which the districts elsewhere are carrying on against Belfast, and all were emphatic in their opinion of deploring the disturbances and of the necessity of getting back to stable and peaceful conditions as early as possible" Considerable developments in the shipbuilding trade contemplated by Harland and Wolff and a £4,000,000 scheme for the development of the Harbour were being held up by the disturbances. "In the circumstances", the report ingenuously remarks, "it is inexplicable that sufficient influence and exertion is not brought to bear to prevent such occurrences as that of July last." At a loss what recommendations to make, the deputation seized on an aspect of the dispute thus far unmentioned as the key to the situation.

Without waiting for the meeting of Congress in 1920, the Executive of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners had sent certain of its members to Belfast to size up the situation at first hand. On August 14 these members of the Executive interviewed representatives of both shipbuilding firms. Following their interview they

<sup>1</sup>"They insisted that they were there to build ships, and could not be concerned with the religious or political views of the workpeople." It is curious how few manufacturers are in business to make profit.



called a meeting of their Belfast members. The meeting was forbidden by the military authorities. The Executive retired to deliberate upon the next step to be taken. Action was deferred pending the meeting of Congress at the opening of September.

For ten days after the close of that assemblage's sessions, the Carpenters' Executive held their hands. The Parliamentary Committee, which had been instructed by an emergency resolution "immediately to call together the executives of the various Trade Unions affected (by the recent disturbances in Belfast)", did not meet until the 25th. On the 21st the Carpenters independently issued a notice to their members in Belfast as follows:

In consequence of the serious disturbances in Belfast district, causing the expulsion of several hundred members of our society from the shipyards, where they were peacefully earning their livelihood, you are hereby informed that you must not accept employment from, or remain in the employment of the following firms:—

- Messrs. Harland and Wolff, Shipbuilders,
- “ Workman and Clark,
- “ McLaughlan and Harvey, Housebuilders,
- “ Coombe, Barbour, Fairbairn, and Lawson, Engineers,
- “ Musgrave and Company Limited, Engineers,
- “ Davidson and Company Limited,
- “ The Sirocco Works, Belfast,
- “ James Mackie and Company.

after 25th September, 1920.

Any member remaining in the employment of these firms after the above date, will be expelled from our society. . .

“Six hundred men obeyed the Executive; about 2,000 remained at work” In consequence they were expelled from the Amalgamated Society.

It was the uncompromising stand taken by this union that the delegation of the Trades Union Congress fastened on as the most serious obstacle to the restoration of peace in Belfast. Unwilling seriously to grapple with the problem, unable to conceive of the dispute as essentially industrial in its nature, and determined to run no risks, come what might, the meeting of Executives of the eighteen trade unions involved, which assembled at last on January 26, 1921, found itself in sympathy with the unfortunate delegates whose hard lot it had been to be assigned the task of sounding out the possibilities of a solution. Fourteen of the eighty delegates present were "added to the Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Committee to deal with the situation" and the meeting broke up<sup>1</sup>. The Sub-Committee thus constituted undertook negotiations with the Carpenters' Executive. In the meantime, however, negotiations had been opened in Belfast through the good offices of the District Committee of the Engineering and Shipbuilding Federation. The Amalgamated Carpenters, now known as the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, therefore declined to continue the conversations. The Sub-Committee found itself reduced to exasperated impotence.

In Belfast a conference was convened in February at which both the Provisional Committee of the men expelled from the society and the local Management Committee of the Woodworkers submitted their proposals for a settlement. In the intervening months the "loyal" carpenters in Belfast had been confronted with "the insidious attempt of the employers to reduce wages by 12s per week". They demanded not only immediate reinstatement in the Union of all members who had paid their contributions regularly to branches under the jurisdiction of the Provisional Com-

<sup>1</sup> This Committee, at a meeting on Feb. 4, submitted to a further purge and elected three of its members to act with the Sub-Committee.

mittee<sup>1</sup> and simultaneous withdrawal of the N.E.C.'s black list, but in addition Executive sanction for the withdrawal of labour from the shipyards and engineering firms that were treacherously seeking to enforce the wage reduction. For its part the Amalgamated Society proposed "that an immediate withdrawal of labour take place to establish the principle", admitted in the terms of settlement proposed by the expelled members, that all future instructions issued by the N. E. C. to maintain the recognition of the Union card in accordance with General Rules should be adhered to, "and also to resist the 12s. reduction" Reinstatement was only promised "subject to such disciplinary measures, if any, as may be decided on by the N. E. C."; moreover, certain classes of men, whose offence had been peculiarly flagrant were to be reserved for special treatment.

On these two points the negotiations broke down. On July 23, 1921, a full Executive meeting of the Woodworkers authorised their General Secretary to inform the Parliamentary Committee "that no good purpose would be served by us endeavouring to open up negotiations with the joiners who were expelled from our organisation"<sup>2</sup>

The Cardiff Congress (September, 1921) listened to eloquent appeals from a Belfast delegation for a boycott on their city; with relief Congress heard a statement on behalf of the Parliamentary Committee:

The key of the situation is the difference in the method between the Executive of the Woodworkers' Union and the methods of the Executives of the other unions concerned in the present dispute. . . . After we left Belfast, or, indeed, before,

<sup>1</sup> All expenditures made by the Provisional Committee, if not out of harmony with the Union rules, were to be charged to the Union.

<sup>2</sup> The above account of the reaction of British Labour to the Belfast expulsions is taken from the Report of the 53rd Trades Union Congress (Cardiff, 1921), pp 82-3, 109-122, and 267-277.

we found that the key of the situation was the relations between the Executive of the Joiners' or the Woodworkers' Society and their members whom they had expelled from membership because these continued to work and to blackleg their fellows.

If only the Woodworkers would forget that their expelled members had blacklegged their fellows and would take them back into the bosom of their Society, thus reconciling their method and the methods of the Executives who had taken no action against such of their members as had blacklegged their fellows, the whole business could be forgotten. Despite many "wild statements" by several delegates who betrayed some knowledge of the working of Belfast politics, Congress adopted a meaningless resolution requesting "the Parliamentary Committee to immediately take all steps necessary to safeguard the interests of Trade Unionists denied the right to work in the Belfast area". With this excellent resolution Congress shook itself free from its Irish responsibilities.

These distressing developments had forced Irish affairs sharply on the attention of the British Labour Party. By 1920 the Executive of the Labour Party had at last come to the conclusion that Ireland must be conceded some degree of genuine self-determination, and that "whatever form of Union may be maintained should be arranged by agreement through negotiation, and not imposed", and that in the meanwhile the army of occupation should be withdrawn. The Stockport election had combined with the Terror and Counter-Terror to convince the Executive that Ireland could no longer be appeased by measures that would have satisfied Redmond; yet they still felt that "the first essential is to change the attitude of the [Irish] people due to generations of unavailing struggle for freedom". The determination of the Labour Party's future line of policy on the Irish question was left to the Conference; there ensued a long

debate toward the close of which one delegate had the temerity to suggest that the Irish Labour Party be consulted and its wishes adopted. In the end a resolution, construed to demand for Ireland absolute freedom of choice, was adopted by a slender majority; an amendment explicitly limiting the right of self-determination to freedom within the Empire, though vigorously advocated by J. H. Thomas, was rejected.<sup>1</sup>

In Parliament the Labour Party ventured to implement the Conference's decision by making a series of definite proposals for Irish settlement. As these proposals received the endorsement of a special Irish Congress in November, 1920,<sup>2</sup> the Brighton Conference in June, 1921, was emboldened to make them its own. The proposals were: (1) that all armed forces of the Crown be withdrawn from Ireland; (2) that the responsibility for maintaining order in each locality in Ireland be placed on the Local Authorities; and (3) that an entirely open Constituent Assembly be immediately elected on the basis of proportional representation, "charged to work out, at the earliest possible moment, without limitations or fetters, whatever Constitution for Ireland the Irish people desire, subject only to two conditions—that it affords protection to minorities, and that the Constitution shall prevent Ireland from becoming a military or naval menace to Great Britain."<sup>3</sup>

Though the Free State was established by means quite other than those advocated by the Labour Party, that organisation was too deeply relieved at the temporary elimination

<sup>1</sup> Thomas said that the Parliamentary Labour Party had been acting on advices from the Irish Labour Party; the amendment he favoured was rejected by 1,191,000 to 945,000. *Cf.* Report of 20th Annual Conference (Scarborough, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* Report of 27th Irish Congress, pp. 23-24

<sup>3</sup> For the corrected text of this resolution, see the Report of the 22nd Annual Conference (Edinburgh, 1922).

of Irish problems from British politics to disturb itself about details. Ignoring the civil war then raging in Ireland, F. W. Jowett, presiding over the Edinburgh Conference (June, 1922), fell back on the innocuous aspiration that "Ireland as a nation . . . can, and I believe, will, make new and helpful departures in agricultural and industrial organisation, from which the workers of this country and of the whole world will profit". "Patrick Pearse and James Connolly did not come together for nothing." Thus did the spirit of James Connolly win recognition from British Labour at the very time when it was becoming evident that that spirit had departed from Irish Labour.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LABOUR AND THE FREE STATE

THE habit of staging demonstrations is a peculiarly difficult one to break. The habit had hardened on the leaders of the Irish labour movement. In addition to the instances recited in an earlier chapter there should be mentioned the Knocklong and Arigna disputes. Acting on their own initiative, members of the I. T. & G. W. U. employed by Messrs. Cleaves in their creamery at Knocklong, co. Limerick, had in May, 1920, taken possession of that establishment. On strike for an increase in wages, the men did not "consider that a break in the financial relations between employer and worker required that accumulated wealth in the form of creamery buildings and machinery . . . should be allowed to go out of use. . . . The farmers agreed with the creamery workers to supply milk as usual, and the milk was turned into butter as hitherto, the financier was not missed"<sup>1</sup> The slogan, "We make butter, not profits",<sup>2</sup> had produced a satisfactory settlement within a week. The success of this vigorous action had induced "the miners employed in one of the coal mines" at Arigna, co. Leitrim, to execute a similar coup.

The President of the Dublin Congress (1921) considered this "the most inspiring business before the Congress".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statement of Thomas Johnson, 1921 Report, p. 92

<sup>2</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, May 22, 1920

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Foran, General President, I. T. & G. W. U. His interpretation of the demonstration's value is significant "There was only one Union concerned in each of these two fights. There was no conflict of

Thomas Johnson solemnly informed the Congress that the action of the workers at Knocklong and Arigna

is the most important question that could be raised in the Labour movement or in Social Economy. . . . It is a challenge—and let us make no mistake about it—to the rights of property. It says: though you happen to have a parchment which allots to you the right to use or possess this machine or that particular factory, though you have that power under legal enactment, henceforth that is not enough. We as responsible to the workers say these material things shall be continued in use so long as the community requires the product. That is the issue raised, and it is a contention that the Labour Party in Ireland I hope will continue to espouse and put into operation.

Congress, however, perhaps influenced by tacit recognition of the fact that success was chiefly due to the extraordinary political conditions then prevailing in Ireland and to the consequent absence of combined action on the part of the employing classes, took no steps to extend the principle involved in the “Knocklong Soviet Creamery”. Instead of setting itself to the task of formulating a scheme for independent action by the organised labour movement in furtherance of its avowed ends, Congress threw itself on the mercy of the Nation. With much eloquence, the delegates adopted a resolution standing in the name of the National Executive, as follows:

This Congress approves of the proposals for dealing with the problem of unemployment outlined in the manifesto of the National Executive entitled “The Country in Danger”. We

interests, they all acted upon one word; that is very important. It can never be successful when you have a multiplicity of Unions. Until we get nearer the One Big Union idea we never can advance as those people did.” The Union Executive seems to have heaved a deep sigh of relief when the demonstrations ended in wage increases and a return to a more familiar system of working. It is important to note that the Union’s Annual Reports omitted all mention of these rank and file movements.



demand that the public authorities, national and local, legislative and administrative, shall adopt as part of the fundamental national policy admitting of no dispute, the right of every citizen to work and maintenance, and that the first charge upon every industry and upon the aggregate income of the nation shall be the maintenance at a decent standard of all citizens who are willing to work.

The Manifesto referred to had been issued by the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress at Eastertide, 1921<sup>1</sup> This document urged:

In the degree that Ireland is content to participate in the scramble for profit-making trade—buying in the cheapest market, and selling in the dearest—Ireland will have to suffer the evil that this scramble involves; Irish manufacturers, farmers and traders will have to bear their share of the gambler's losses, and large numbers of the less fortunate among the Irish workers will be relegated to the reservoir of unemployed labour power.

Those for whom we are entitled to speak—the organised wage-workers—are not content to be classed with raw material in an employer's book of costs. They are asking for a valid reason why willing workers should be unemployed, why their families should be hungry. They look around and see fertile lands and mineral wealth in abundance, the means of transit easily available; the ability, experience and strength of willing men, all waiting to be brought into fruitful contact. And they also ask why the food and clothes and comforts now on hands awaiting customers, or the means to buy them—the tokens called money—cannot be paid to them in exchange for their labour, to enable them to live as self-respecting citizens while reproducing further wealth.

<sup>1</sup> It was calculated that at that time the unemployed amounted to "about 110,000 persons out of a total of wage earners in the whole country of about 700,000". For the full text of the Manifesto, see 1921 Report, pp 39-47.

When a nation is attacked, all citizens are summoned to its defence. If the defence is well organised, every available man will be mobilised, every natural advantage made use of, every resource drawn upon, and personal interests, tastes, fancies, and social customs either voluntarily resigned, or pushed aside. So it must be in this day of Ireland's trial.

Is it too great a thing to ask, in the light of the sacrifices that are being made daily, that for a year, or two years, or as long as the crisis lasts, Irishmen and women should consider that from a date to be fixed their possessions and their personal faculties shall be dedicated to the service of the Nation? This is not to demand the sacrifice of their property. It is to ask, without calling upon the power of the state, as in other countries, to compel—that the land and wealth-producing machinery should be loaned without charge to the nation “for the duration of the war”, and that the labour and ability of its citizens should be devoted to its service for adequate reward.

Appealing to the Democratic Programme adopted by Dail Eireann at its inaugural meeting, January 21, 1919, the Manifesto proceeds to enumerate a variety of suggestions for the coordination of Irish industrial services. “It is imperative”, reads No. 9, “that the nation must accept responsibility for ensuring that every citizen shall have an opportunity of doing useful work, and be adequately rewarded therefor. This is a duty already accepted on behalf of the nation by its elected representatives. It still awaits practical application.” Embodying as it did the principle enunciated in the slogan, “The Land for Men—Not for Bullocks”, and including an appeal to Irish investors to make sure that their bank deposits did not find their way into British industrial undertakings, the Manifesto was calculated to interest manufacturers and merchants, farmers and financiers; yet it need not have caused surprise that “no response has come except a demand for reductions in wages”.

At Congress, in August, 1921, Mr. Johnson felt under the necessity of pointing out the significance of the whole episode. The Manifesto had constituted a challenge, alike to the employing class and to the country as a whole; the challenge had been ignored.

Our responsibility [he argued] therefore has ceased. I charge the employers of this country with thick-headedness, with carelessness of the consequence of their inactivity, with an utter disregard to the possibilities of the country, and with no thought whatever of the livelihood of the people. The challenge was put up to them; they have not considered the scheme, which is not the scheme we would put into operation if we had complete power. It was a challenge to them in the shape of certain practical proposals, but no response has been heard from any employers' organisation in the country. . . . I say, that being the effect of the issue of the manifesto, we are relieved of the responsibility of putting it into operation. By their inactivity they have declared war. In my opinion, they ought to have war. . . . But let us bear in mind what it means. It means that we may have to face a definite social revolution. . . . I do not think we should go out of this Congress without saying, on behalf of the organised workers of Ireland: "Unless in the immediate future there is some sign on the part of the employing class in the country, and on the part of those who have power in the country to compel that their decrees shall be obeyed, unless there is some sign on the part of these people that the problem is going to be faced resolutely, then we must take up the challenge and fight for our livelihood."<sup>1</sup>

Relieved of the responsibility of putting its principles into practice, the mighty organ of the Irish labour movement was in danger of becoming a replica of the marvelous British talking machine. Deputations cannot wage "war"; resolutions do not accomplish "social revolution".

To the Executive of the Irish Labour Party, excluded

<sup>1</sup> 1921 Report, pp. 138-139.

by its own decision not to contest elections under the "Partition Act" from all participation in the proceedings of Dail Eireann, it seemed that the stirring scenes being played in an upper room at the National University were incomplete without a contribution from them. The convulsive sobs of the President of the Republic, as he dramatically collapsed on that eventful evening of January 7, 1922, required some histrionic counterblast. So it happened that on the third day—the very day on which the new President formed his Cabinet—An Dail received a deputation from the Irish Labour Party. A few short hours before the Welshman to whom had been entrusted the funeral arrangements of the Irish Republic bellowed out his emphatic refusal to "reply to any damned Englishman in this Assembly", an Englishman long in Ireland's service shepherded the members of his Executive onto the very floor of the deliberative chamber. From his vantage point beside Kinchora he recited the struggles and sacrifices of the workers for the Nation, pictured their present sorrows and sufferings, and concluded his deliberately uttered remarks with the threat:

The workers were not prepared to continue the low standard upon which they were living before the war. When demands were being made in all kinds of occupations to degrade that standard, it meant that the workers were going to resist in whatever way they thought best. Their patience was becoming exhausted, and it was insistent that the problems of unemployment, tillage, and housing should be immediately tackled.

They would not brook delay waiting on political exigencies. They realised the difficulties of the situation, and were prepared to make every allowance for them, but they wanted to emphasise the importance of dealing with the problem effectually. If that were not done, the people would rise and sweep them away, as they would sweep away any Government which failed to do its duty to the common people.

Curtly but benignly, President Griffith assured the delegation: "I know and understand perfectly this question of unemployment." With an offer to appoint a Committee "to try and deal with this question" he dismissed them from the room and, apparently, dismissed all thought of the matter from his head.<sup>1</sup>

The split between the political factions soon to be known as Republicans and Free Staters absorbed the whole attention of the leaders on both sides. "Labour must wait" was the monotonous cry of all the political leaders. In the industrial field, too, labour was face to face with the same necessity. The official figures of the Irish Department of the British Ministry of Labour showed 113,357 persons "totally unemployed at 9th December, 1921". In addition, 18,118 persons "were working systematic short-time in such a manner as to entitle them to benefit under the Unemployment Insurance Acts". To appreciate the full significance of these figures it is necessary to realise that they include only persons actually drawing unemployment benefit from the Government. "The number of persons insured under the Unemployment Insurance Acts of 1920 and 1921 is estimated at 439,193." From the operation of those Acts domestic servants and agricultural labourers are excluded. The inclusion of the latter would have increased the number of insurable persons by several hundred thousand; to what extent it would have increased the roster of the unemployed cannot be accurately ascertained, but there is every reason to believe that the percentage of unemployment would not thereby have been lessened. The situation, then, was, that of the industrial workers of Ireland, "25.8 per cent were totally unemployed" and 4.2 per cent. were on systematic short-time; the corresponding figures "for the United Kingdom as a whole" were only 15.7 and 2.3 per cent. respectively.

<sup>1</sup> Cf 1922 Report, pp. 13-17.

While thirty per cent of the workers were thus unable to earn a normal livelihood, the position of the workers not subsisting on Government subsidies was not perceptibly better. A contemporary inquiry into the cost of living, "based on the dietary scale in the Dublin workhouse in May, 1921", found that at prevailing retail prices the cost of a weekly ration for a family of two adults and four children, sedentary pauper inmates of the Dublin Workhouse, was 47s. 11¼d.

A special Commission which was appointed by the Cork Corporation in March, 1919, to inquire into a maintenance standard for a working class family, and which comprised merchants, professional men, clergymen, as well as Trade Union officials, fixed a figure equalling 34s. 2d for these requirements. . . . [*i. e.*] an additional sum for extra food, which an active life demands above the sedentary life of a workhouse inmate, and for rent, clothing and the other minimum requirements for a decent existence.

Adding these two figures, the result is the sum of £4 2s. 1¼d. as the minimum necessary for the decent support of an average Dublin labourer and his family. But the Report of the Housing, Workshops, and Supplies Committee of the Dublin Corporation (1922) gives a carter's weekly wages as £3 5s., a vanman's £3, and a painter for the Port and Docks Board £4 6s. The average wage of a skilled worker in steady employment works out at just about £4 a week. This figure makes no allowance for the preponderance of the unskilled labourers or for the virtual impossibility of finding steady employment.<sup>1</sup>

The living conditions of Dublin's working population excite no amazement only because they have been so long

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also figures given by Mr. Johnson in the *Voice of Labour*, April 8, 1922.

chronic Only a few blocks from the National University, where An Dail Eireann met to debate the ratification of the Treaty, and at the foot of Cork Hill, on whose summit, hard by the Castle, the Corporation used to sit, the ancient steeple of St. Patrick's Cathedral—"the spiritual home"<sup>1</sup> of the Protestant Ascendancy—looks down on a scene of indescribable squalor. For the denizens of the Coombe, "formerly a hive of industry",<sup>2</sup> when as the Liberties it was renowned as the chief seat of the weavers, is reserved the privilege of hearing the silvery bells of the old cathedral peal out the motto that is inscribed on a field-marshal's memorial near the high altar: *Homo homini lupus*. Dilapidated buildings, sagging under the weight of years, here and there an open space littered with the bricks and stones of a house that finally tired of standing, ragged children, a toothless old crone hobbling along by the wall—such are the sights that greet the eye of the visitor to this lonely and deserted, but "most celebrated of Irish churches".<sup>3</sup> Similar scenes are to be met with in the purlieus of the Catholic pro-cathedral in Marlborough-street. Inside one may find a throng of worshippers, a portly priest performing the functions of his holy office, the ragged Christians devoutly crossing themselves as they kneel with heads reverently bowed in the presence of awful solemnity. Outside are decrepit houses shored up with heavy timbers lest they collapse at the tenants' risk and the owner's expense.

Throughout the city one may find long blocks of once splendid houses, with spacious, lofty-ceilinged rooms, now gone to rack and ruin and inhabited by a despairing proletariat. With three and four families sharing a single room,

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is that of the Most Hon and Rt Rev. J. H. Bernard, D. D., Provost of Trinity College, Dublin University.

<sup>2</sup> *Official Guide to Dublin* (Dublin, 1924).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Dean Swift and "Stella" lie under the paving.

devoid of anything that may be properly described as furniture, these structures resemble rabbit-warrens more than dwellings in which human beings would pay to live. Built in the days when sanitary facilities were undeveloped, and remodelled only to the minimum extent insisted on by a slum-owning Corporation, such buildings rarely can boast more than a water-tap in the basement and a backhouse in the yard. Worse still, the observer who ventures through the archway cut in the middle of the block will find in the centre of the square, occupying what was formerly garden-space, an accumulation of filthy hovels that would put a peasant village to shame. To take a specific instance, Asylum Yard provided relatively desirable lodgings. A narrow alley leads into an unevenly paved space in which stand some twenty-nine whitewashed "cottages" with leaky slate roofs. Two tiny rooms in each cottage—no heat, no light, no water. Five persons is a low average for a family. There is also a house opening on the court with "fine, big rooms", as the cottagers enviously remarked. Scarcely a pane of glass intact—no heat, no light, no water. The sanitary equipment for these thirty-five or forty families consists of six water-closets—none of them in proper working order—and two water-taps—all in the open yard. The rent was low: for one of the cottages 3s. a week; for a room in the house 4s. But the landlord exacts an initial deposit of £1, not as an advance instalment on the rent, but to be retained against the well-nigh inevitable day when he will be put to the expense of an eviction for non-payment of the rent when due.

Nor are these conditions confined to Dublin. In every provincial town of Ireland they are faithfully reproduced. Widespread unemployment, inadequate wages, unspeakable housing—these things were pressing on the working class throughout the infant Irish Free State.



Week by week the *Voice of Labour* pressed home to its readers the perils of their situation. Appeals by Thomas Johnson to "Hold the Harvest", warnings of an approaching offensive by the employers, reprints of Connolly's articles enlivened the pages of the official organ of the I. T. & G. W. U. Though tempered with "Lenin on Compromise and Retreat", such language bore fruit. Excited by fireside tales of military exploits during the Terror and confiding in the strength Irish labour seemed to have gathered during the national struggle, the rank and file behaved themselves like children released from school. A violent epidemic of seizures of industrial and even agricultural enterprises broke out. The Executive of the Transport Union was seriously embarrassed, its members had no stomach for that sort of guerilla warfare. That portion of the Irish Republican Army that accepted the authority of the Provisional Government was freely employed to oust the "soviets", and the Union's bank balance was seriously endangered by damage suits brought by the injured employers. Though the *Voice of Labour* continued exultantly to chronicle such seizures as met with a measure of success, the Executive officially disowned the activities of their members and frowned on their policy. Too prudent to seek to utilise the Republican ferment to bring on a "definite social revolution", those on whom Connolly's mantle had legally fallen set themselves to the effort to maintain uniformity of front by marking time and blustering. Here and there the Union stoutly resisted a reduction of wages or an extension of hours, but the main energies of the Executive were devoted to the work of perfecting the Union's organisation. This policy was reflected in the Balance Sheet: though "the expenditure was £18,909 more than 1921, being, in fact, the highest in the history of the Union since it became a nationwide organisation", the amount spent in dispute pay was

only £33,139 as against £40,571 in 1919 and £36,847 in 1920, the income too increased by £14,414, and the cash balance at the end of 1922 was swollen to the unprecedented figure of £109,297.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, and after its own fashion, the Labour Party was "getting to grips with unemployment".<sup>2</sup> On the very day that the Dail received the labour deputation, the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress issued an "Address to the Workers of Ireland". Its tenor was expressed by the *Voice of Labour* in the caption, "What We Have We Hold":

During the war the workers have refrained from pressing their demands for a decent standard of material comfort. Rather than be a cause of weakness in the national struggle, they have been content to accept increases in money wages seldom exceeding, usually not reaching, the increase in the cost of living.

The hour has now struck for the workers to emerge from the shade. When the contest opens in the political arena we shall take our place. At the moment the call to action comes from the industrial field. Our opponents are our employers. During the war and the truce they have been gathering strength and preparing to dispute our claim that we are something more than beasts of burden let out for hire; something other than mere repositories of man-power to be turned on or off according as we are producing a profit or a loss.

To the workers, again, we say: Unite and stand fast! Do not allow yourselves to be drawn into opposing camps. As you have shown solidarity in the Nation's cause, let you now show the same solidarity in your struggle for bread!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report for 1922, I T & G. W. U.

<sup>2</sup> *Voice of Labour*, Feb. 4, 1922.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan 14, 1922; cf. also 1922 Report, pp. 18-21.

"Following on the visit of the National Executive of the Labour Party to Dail Eireann, representatives of the National Executive met the President and the Ministers of Finance, Local Government, Economics, Labour and Agriculture on two occasions."<sup>1</sup> At these conferences a series of definite proposals was put forward on behalf of the N. E., as follows:

1. That a compulsory Tillage Order should be made.
2. Road making and repairing to be done as far as possible by local Trade Union labour.
3. That architects should be called upon to specify for Irish materials and designs that can be carried out in Ireland.
4. That the Waterford Meat Factory should be proceeded with.
5. The Drogheda Meat Factory should be taken over by the public authority.
6. That seasonal work should be put into operation as far as possible during the winter, especially by public boards.
7. That the question of importation of foreign milled flour should be considered with a view to prohibition until Irish mills were fully employed.
8. That Housing schemes should be pressed forward by finances obtained from the National Government.
9. That the Government should be urged to enter into arrangements with the Russian Government with a view to supplying materials (agricultural machinery, etc.), and foodstuffs, of which Ireland has a surplus, in direct exchange for raw materials for manufacture and building from Russia.<sup>2</sup>

At the Annual Meeting of the I. L. P. & T. U. C. six months later the Executive was asked whether any of these proposals had been put into operation. Mr. Johnson could only reply:

<sup>1</sup> *Voice of Labour*, Feb 4, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> 1922 Report, p. 17.

The Compulsory Tillage Order was refused by the Minister of Agriculture, and his refusal assented to by the other Ministers. "Road making and repairing to be done, as far as possible, by local trade union labour." That has not been insisted upon, so far as I understand. "That architects should be called upon to specify for Irish materials and designs that can be carried out in Ireland." This condition has been imposed within the last few years, but with what success I am unable to say. "That seasonal work should be put into operation as soon and as far as possible, during the winter, especially by public boards." I understand the Local Government has advised that that practice should be adopted. With regard to the question of the importation of foreign flour, nothing has been done. As to the housing scheme, there has been something done by the Government, but, as most of you know, it is comparatively small. In respect of item 9—"That the Government should be urged to enter into an arrangement with the Russian Government with a view to supplying materials (agricultural machinery, etc.) and foodstuffs, of which Ireland has a surplus, in direct exchange for raw material for manufacture and building from Russia"—I am quite confident in saying that the Government was prepared to receive favourably any suggestion of that kind, but it was found not practicable on the Russian side.<sup>1</sup>

In another connection Mr. Johnson acknowledged that some of us have felt conscience-stricken because the Labour Party officially has not taken as active a part in agitating the question of unemployment as we would have taken in other circumstances. We have held aloof from agitation on this question, believing that the circumstances warranted holding aloof.<sup>2</sup>

What those circumstances were and how they had arisen must now be explained. It will be recalled that in 1918

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

and again in 1921 labour had "stood down" at the general election, with the avowed purpose of leaving the way clear for an unequivocal expression of Ireland's demand for nationhood. Though many members of the Dail—Sean M'Keon for example—were members of the Transport or other Unions, Richard Corish of Wexford was the only "active Labour man" in that body. Indeed, Wexford's labour mayor had been censured by the National Executive for accepting the nomination, though he had taken no pledge to the Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, as the *Voice of Labour* pointed out, "the Dail and not Labour has been entrusted and invested by the Irish people with the authority and responsibility". Expressing regret at the split in the nationalist ranks then rapidly coming to light, the *Voice* urged on all trade and labour bodies the imperative need to refrain from taking sides, by resolution or otherwise, with either party to the division of opinion in the Dail. "To take such foolish action will be to rend in twain the Unions and the whole Labour movement on the very eve of its most crucial trial."<sup>2</sup>

"Unity", Connolly had written in 1896, "is a good thing, no doubt, but honesty is better, and if unity can only be obtained by the suppression of truth and the toleration of falsehood, then it is not worth the price we are asked to pay for it."<sup>3</sup> In those trying days at the transition from the old year to the new, Connolly's name was freely bandied about by all conditions of politicians.<sup>4</sup> The article from which the pregnant sentence quoted above is excerpted was

<sup>1</sup> 1921 Report, pp. 17-19 and pp. 110-115.

<sup>2</sup> *Voice of Labour*, Dec. 17, 1921

<sup>3</sup> "Can Irish Republicans be Politicians?" *Shan Van Vocht*, Nov., 1896.

<sup>4</sup> The "Friends of Irish Freedom" in New York were a striking exception; inquiry for Connolly's writings at their office was met with the response that they had never heard of anyone by that name.

reprinted, with others, by the *Voice of Labour* itself. Yet his old friends and associates threw themselves energetically into the effort to preserve the will-o'-the-wisp—"unity". Not only did Johnson become conspicuous as a lobbyist for the pro-Treaty forces, but representatives of the N. E. submitted to the leaders of both sides a compromise proposal. The gist of their rather involved project was that the Dail as such should not divide on the Treaty. Instead, its members should meet as the "members of Parliament elected for constituencies in Southern Ireland"; it was to be "agreed beforehand that a majority will be present to approve" the Treaty. "The Dail remains in authority"; the Provisional Government required by the Treaty was to be merely a Committee of the Dail for the purpose of receiving the surrender of powers by the British Government. The Constitution was to be framed by the Dail. When everything had been satisfactorily arranged, the Dail was to ratify the Treaty by legislative enactment, thus preserving the sovereignty of the Irish people.<sup>1</sup>

While the National Executive of the Labour Party was thus pressing for ratification, the official organ of the Transport Union was lending its columns to approaches from the Republican camp. In particular, Aodh de Blacain (*alias* Hugh Black), a free-lance journalist, pleaded for the identity of interest between Labour and the Republicans.<sup>2</sup> It was indeed sufficiently obvious from the course of the Dail debates, from the tone of the daily Press, and from the floods of pro-Treaty resolutions pouring in from Chambers of Commerce, farmers' organisations, and public bodies that the weight of the employing farmers, of the shopkeepers, and of business interests generally was being thrown on the side

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1922 *Report*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Labour, the 'Free State', and the Republic", *Voice of Labour*, Jan. 7, 1922.

of ratification. But, suspicious of the failure of all the responsible Republican leaders to denounce the opposition on the ground of its bourgeois nature, and persuaded that "When all is said and done the Republican opposition will find that out of the very necessities of the case it will be driven back upon the Workers' Republic before the full aims of Irish Republicans are gained", the *Voice of Labour* fell back on a policy of impartially belabouring the opposing political parties.

Nor were these factions themselves voiceless. At the beginning of January appeared the first number of one of those irregular sheets, "Registered as a Newspaper", so familiar to the reading public of Ireland. *Poblacht na h-Eireann* (*The Republic of Ireland*) announced "Our Policy" in part as follows:

We shall labour to unite the Irish people, temporarily dis-united under duress and the temptations of an easy peace, upon the only basis upon which unity is possible—loyalty to the Irish Republic, established once for all in 1919, and never to be forsworn without dishonour.<sup>1</sup>

Though this paper was edited by Liam Mellows, T. D., and Frank Gallagher, who of all the Republicans were regarded, as the most intelligently sympathetic to the cause of labour, the definition of policy used the word "labour" only as a verb—and in the first person plural; it is especially significant that the Irish Republic is defined, not as the Republic whose Proclamation bore Connolly's signature, but as the Republic of 1919, in whose establishment Labour had had no share.<sup>2</sup> In Ireland political argumentation cannot be conducted without the aid of the glorious dead. The parlous

<sup>1</sup> *Poblacht na h-Eireann*, I, No. 1, Jan. 3, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> The 1916 Proclamation was, however, reprinted on the first page of this first issue.

task of exhuming the words of the heroes of 1916 was vehemently undertaken; Connolly must take pot-luck with the rest. His last message was triumphantly republished;<sup>1</sup> his daughter was pressed into service to agitate the question of "Republic or Dominion".<sup>2</sup>

In all this there was nothing to appeal to the living labourer, at grips with the "perpetual struggle against sordid poverty, dirt and ignorance". Though *Poblacht na h-Eireann* might remark: "President Griffith has made race the test of citizenship. Why should not Labour make class the test?"—though "Labour in Ireland" made a catchy title for an editorial, the refrain was ever the monomaniac "The national welfare, as distinct from the welfare of this or that class, is a thing sacred" to the opponents of the Treaty.<sup>3</sup> The appeals of Aodh de Blacain were no more forceful in the pages of the Republican organ than they were in the *Voice of Labour*. As the spring wore on and the thunderheads massed ever more portentously on the horizon, *Poblacht na h-Eireann* drifted ever further out of contact with the *Voice of Labour*.

The running fire of brilliant satire poured on the Provisional Government by *Poblacht na h-Eireann* at length drove the pro-Treaty forces into an effort to retaliate in kind. In the middle of February a fresh "National Political Weekly" entered the field of literary combat. *The Separatist* attempt a policy of straddle.<sup>4</sup> The inherent

<sup>1</sup> *Poblacht na h-Eireann* No. 2 (Jan. 5, 1922), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 3, (Jan. 10, 1922) p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 4. (Jan. 17, 1922).

<sup>4</sup> "We stand for the complete separation of Ireland from England, without any association external or internal, save such association as independent nations normally conclude with each other for the mutual regulation of trade, etc." *The Separatist* No. 1, Feb. 18, 1922. Pursuit of this policy ultimately led to condemnation of "De Valera's Road to Ruin", *ibid.*, No. 6, March 25, 1922.



weakness of its position vitiated the value of its ably written articles. To give better expression to the views of the pro-Treaty forces, still another 2d. paper appeared on the stalls, *An Saorstát*, translated as *The Free State*.

*The Free State* differed from its predecessors and rivals in that, devoid of any sense of humour, its editors balked at no vulgarity; no indecent reference to its opponents was too gross for its trim pages. Stung to the quick by the irony of the Republicans, and as though hounded by a sense of guilt, *The Free State* attempted to justify "surrender" by an obscene account of the humiliations inflicted by the British military on the men who in 1916 had marched out of the blazing Post Office only after the roof had fallen in.<sup>1</sup> Haunted by the dread spectres of the dead, *The Free State* snatched a chance bone from their rattling skeletons.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Free State*, No. 2, March 4, 1922

<sup>2</sup> Under the heading "Ghosts", *The Free State* reprinted from the *Workers' Republic* of Jan 22, 1916 what it called "Connolly's Way". "The moment Peace is once admitted by the British Government as being a subject ripe for discussion that moment our policy will be for peace and in direct opposition to all talk of preparation for armed revolution. We shall be no party to leading out Irish Patriots to meet the might of an England at peace. The moment peace is in the air we shall strictly confine ourselves and lend all our influence to the work of turning the thought of Labour in Ireland to the work of peaceful reconstruction." These sentences, taken in their context, constitute a most forceful condemnation of the policy of Sinn Féin from start to finish. Sinn Féin had not supported Connolly's demand for a revolt while England was in the midst of the war with Germany, but had, in 1919, been "party to leading out Irish Patriots to meet the might of an England at peace." The article from which the passage is excerpted begins "The Labour Movement is like no other movement. Its strength lies in being like no other movement. It is never so strong as when it stands alone. Other movements dread analysis and shun all attempts to define their objects. The Labour Movement delights in analysing, and is perpetually defining and re-defining its principles and objects. . . . Thus we strove to make Labour in Ireland organised—and revolutionary. We realised that the power of the enemy to hurl his forces upon the forces of Ireland

For Labour *The Free State* had few significant words. To a page article on the possible "profitable results" of the "Economic Development of Industrial Ireland" was added, as it were an afterthought, a brief paragraph:

It is essential that such a movement be carried out on co-operative principles; that is to say, Labour ought to be invited to participate in such a development, so that the people of the country of every class would have an interest in the development and the prosperity which is bound to accrue from such a movement.<sup>1</sup>

Again, under the caption of "Freedom Emerging", it was affirmed:

There need be no antagonism between Capital and Labour. It is a fatalistic attitude of mind to say that there must. A plan and an understanding acceptable to both, alterable and adjustable as circumstances indicate, is possible. We live in Ireland not hide-hardened industrial England. The "working" man, and every other type of man who works, has a right to the most that life can afford, and the supplier of the capital that sets labour to work has a right to his reward in accordance with the necessity that called his kind into existence and keeps it in existence.<sup>2</sup>

Thus innocently oblivious of all the experience of Labour in Irish history, *The Free State* ignored the unpleasant necessity of taking account of the social problem.

The supercilious neglect of both parties to the political would lie at the mercy of the men who controlled the transport system of Ireland; we saw that the hopes of Ireland a Nation rested upon the due recognition of the identity of interest between that ideal and the rising hopes of Labour." Sinn Féin has at no period of its evolution sought to give effect to that identity.

<sup>1</sup> *The Free State*, No. 14, May 27, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 18, June 24, 1922.

wrangle found its counterpart in the absence of constructive thought on the part of the responsible leaders of the Irish labour movement. Unwilling to imperil the imposing machine constructed with so much painstaking toil, the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress refused to go beyond the heading off of an occasional effort to depress wages, lengthen hours of labour, or otherwise adversely affect the working conditions of its members. The responsibility for broad constructive projects the N. E. threw on the duly constituted governmental authorities. Though the *Voice of Labour* published "A Labour Draft Bill for Prevention of Unemployment", admittedly adapted from the British Labour Party's Bill,<sup>1</sup> Irish labour had no leader capable of acting up to the time-honoured slogan, "The great only appear great because we are on our knees; let us rise". The *Workers' Republic*, revived in October, 1921, as the official organ of the Socialist—soon to be Communist—Party of Ireland, heaped vituperation on the "*V(o)ice of Labour*", but had itself nothing to offer but an extended academic exposition of Muscovite dogma.

On February 21, as the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis was gathering in the Round Room of the Mansion House, a special meeting of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress was held behind closed doors in the Abbey Theatre. At the close of a long and somewhat acrimonious debate Congress adopted, by a vote of 104 to 49, the recommendation of the N. E. that the Labour Party contest the forthcoming election as an independent unit. The platitudinous statement of policy and programme embodied in the N. E.'s recommendations was simultaneously adopted. Another motion, voicing a demand for a plebiscite on the acceptance or rejection of the Treaty before the election was carried

<sup>1</sup> *Voice of Labour*, Jan. 21, 1922.

by 128 votes to 12.<sup>1</sup> Armed with these resolutions, Mr. Johnson, as Secretary of the Labour Party, entered into correspondence with President Griffith. His best efforts, however, could effect nothing; the President's reply was that in conformity with the agreement reached at the Ard Fheis, the election itself must decide whether the Treaty was to be honoured and at the same time select the members of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Disappointed in this direction, the Labour Party went ahead with its preparations for the electoral contest. As the peril of civil war grew ever more threatening, the N. E. persisted in its indefatigable efforts to patch up a working compromise between the politico-military factions. One more demonstration was attempted. In the midst of the bewildering succession of Army Conferences and Mansion House Peace Conferences, the N. E. issued a call for a one day "General Strike" as a protest against militarism. With the hearty cooperation of the employers and of the Press, a 15-hour stoppage of work was arranged for Monday, April 24. The opportunity was utilised to hold mass meetings in all the large towns and cities, at which anti-militarist and pro-parliamentary resolutions were adopted by show of hands.<sup>3</sup>

To have contested every constituency at the election would have been too costly a demonstration. Accordingly, official

<sup>1</sup> For a report of the Special Congress on Election Policy, see 1922 Report, pp. 57-87.

<sup>2</sup> The correspondence is printed in 1922 Report, pp. 41-45.

<sup>3</sup> For an extended account of the Labour Party's efforts for peace, cf. 1922 Report, pp. 21-34. Much alarm was excited in Dublin on April 24th by the posting of a proclamation, over the names of Johnson and Foran, calling on the workers to man the barricades; the proclamation was repudiated by everybody. The Communists held counter-demonstrations after the official meetings; in January they had tried their hand at demonstrating by seizing the Rotunda in the name of the unemployed.

Labour candidates were nominated only where they had "a reasonable prospect of success". Eighteen names, mostly of members of the Transport Union, were put forward by the Labour Party. A piecemeal programme was issued, comprising perfectly definite but uncoordinated proposals. As *Poblacht na h-Eireann* pointed out, "the programme was, on the whole, not worthy . . . of an intelligent, determined and far-seeing Labour movement".<sup>1</sup>

Labour's opponents were not inactive. By a pact arranged between Collins and De Valera, the rival parties in the Sinn Féin organisation had agreed to support a Coalition Panel, which was to be made up of the candidates of both parties in proportion to their strength in the existing Dail. On May 20 the Dail had decreed an election, subject to this agreement.<sup>2</sup> Thus the electors were to be deprived of the opportunity to express their will at the polls. Only by voting for independent candidates could the electors affect the balance in the Dail; only 47 non-Panel candidates took the field.

Among the independent candidates were the Labour Party's eighteen nominees: in only nine constituencies was there a direct conflict between champions of Labour and independent representatives of capitalist interests; in the other five constituencies the Labour candidates had only the Panel to fight. Though the Labour Party refrained from direct expression of its position on the Treaty question, its

<sup>1</sup> *Poblacht na h-Eireann*, June 15, 1922: "Why You Should Not Vote For The Independent Candidates." For the text of the Programme, *cf.* 1922 Report, pp. 46-48.

<sup>2</sup> The Pact announced itself as "on the ground that the National position requires the entrusting of the Government of the country into the joint hands of those who have been the strength of the National situation during the last few years, without prejudice to their present respective positions". For the text, *cf.* *Poblacht na h-Eireann*, May 5, 1922; in the same issue is to be found a very good description of the scenes in the Dail on the announcement of the agreement.

"Address to the Electors" implicitly presupposed that the Irish Free State would be established; the Labour candidates were popularly rated as pro-Treaty. Another element among the independent candidates were the twelve nominees of the Farmers' Union, these, and the independent representatives of urban employing interests were openly pro-Treaty.

Confused as was the issue put before the electorate, two tendencies may be discerned in the election figures. In the first place, wherever there was a straight fight between Treatyites and advocates of the "Back to 1918" formula, the latter went down to ignominious defeat. Of the 66 names on the pro-Treaty side of the Panel, 56 were returned; of the 59 names on the anti-Treaty side only 36 were returned. Seventeen on each side were returned unopposed. Of the remaining nineteen academic Republicans elected, only four were returned at the expense of pro-Treaty Panel candidates.

In the second place, there was manifest the will to have as democratic a Constituent Assembly as was compatible with the defeat of the anti-Treaty candidates. Of Labour's eighteen nominees, seventeen were triumphantly returned; the eighteenth was defeated by the narrow margin of 13 votes on the final count. On the other hand, the Farmers' Union carried only seven seats out of twelve. In only three cases was a farmer returned when the electors had before them an alternative pro-Treaty candidate. Still more striking was the fact that only one independent representative of the urban capitalist class was returned, had he not been elected, the choice must in this constituency have fallen on an anti-Treaty Panel candidate.

Aside from the issue of peace or war, the election returns cannot be construed as expressing confidence in the Provisional Government. In the few cases in which it was

possible to vote against the pro-Treaty Panel candidates without voting for an avowed representative of Capital on the one hand or a protagonist of metaphysical formulas on the other, the electorate expressed its want of confidence in the social ideals of the Free State Party. As clearly as circumstances permitted, the election showed a prevailing sentiment in favour of the ideals of Pearse and Connolly rather than those of Arthur Griffith. Coupled with the manifestations of undirected energy displayed by the trade union rank and file, the electoral figures seem to indicate that the country was reasonably ripe for the much discussed "social revolution".

Thomas Johnson, the ablest of the labour leaders and the most important official of the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, had no intention, however, of giving a lead in that direction. As he put it, von Kluck did not take Paris on raw turnips. The numerical and financial organisation of labour had reached a pitch of perfection unprecedented in the annals of the Irish labour movement, but to risk all the hard-won gains of Irish Labour on a desperate venture for the establishment of the Workers' Republic was too bold a line of policy for the men who by patient plodding and adroit advertisement had built up the formidable labour organisation.

Behind Thomas Johnson stood as the chief bulwark of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. Of the 244 delegates, representing 294,560 members of affiliated trade unions and trades councils, in attendance at the 28th Annual Meeting (August, 1922), 102 delegates, representing 100,000 members, were sent by the I. T. & G. W. U. In the Annual Reports of this mighty Union there is no hint that the Executive visualised any other policy than drifting with the stream

Once embarked on the course of using the Dail "for the purpose of protesting, of denouncing, and of advocating certain remedies to meet the problem of unemployment",<sup>1</sup> the National Executive found itself unable to launch any other plan of action. The scheduled meeting of the Dail was repeatedly postponed; when Congress met in August the country was in the throes of civil war; the Parliament still stood prorogued. The National Executive had been able to devise no more effective policy than to advise that if no meeting of the nation's elected representatives were held on or before August 26, the Labour members should resign their seats "We demand", said Mr. Johnson in seconding the N. E. motion, "the opportunity to do the work we were appointed to do. If we are refused that opportunity we throw the responsibility upon the others, and we shall see what we shall see."

Congress expressed its concurrence with this attitude by adopting unanimously the recommendation of the National Executive. Practically the whole of the Congress' agenda was taken up with resolutions involving political, not industrial action.<sup>2</sup> Confiding in the wisdom of their elected representatives and absorbingly interested in their new toy, the delegates raised little protest against this supersession of industrial by political matters. A proposal was made that the N. E. be enlarged and that "from the members of the Executive a Special Committee shall be appointed to deal with purely industrial matters". But Miss Bennett, who moved this resolution, thought it "absolutely right that this Congress should consider National affairs very seriously"; she only felt

that there are a great many minor matters—industrial and trade union matters—that are of vital importance to the workers, and

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Johnson, 1922 Report, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Even the housing question was ignored.



if the National Executive is composed of men who are faced with these big National problems, it is inevitable that smaller industrial matters would be a little bit pushed to one side.

Very few of the delegates who took part in the ensuing debate displayed any desire to provide for better coordination in the field of industrial action. William O'Brien, General Treasurer of the I. T. & G. W. U., aroused considerable resentment by intimating that all those who really wished more effective industrial action should join the Transport Union. By one of the Labour members of the Dail it was urged that "it is the duty of the unions themselves to look after their industrial affairs". Mr. Johnson, Secretary of the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, pointed out that, under the Constitution, the National Executive had no authority to compel the unions to follow its lead; the tenor of his remarks implied that he deemed it undesirable to increase the powers of the N. E. Only a solitary woman openly protested that "there has been no question whatever dealt with in the industrial field. . . . All the time has absolutely been taken up with political discussions." Mr. Foran, General President of the Transport Union, anticipating the resignation of the Labour T. D.'s, spoke brave words: "We will be thrown back on the real strength and power of the working class" But his subsequent remarks belied his contempt of political action.<sup>1</sup> In the end Miss Bennett was induced to withdraw her resolution, as she could see that it "only touched the fringe of the question".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "If we are to develop as a political party in this country, then I believe it is not six members you ought to have on a Committee of the present National Executive, but a real Industrial Executive in addition to the Political Executive" Mr. Foran's opposition in February to contesting the elections did not prevent him from accepting election to Seanad Eireann in December.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Bennett withdrew on the understanding "that the incoming

The only other non-political matter (excepting inter-Union disputes) that came before Congress in 1922 was the Dublin Building Guild. But even here, though Thomas MacPartlin, moving spirit in the Guild, protested that "the success of the guilds does not depend on the employers nor on the members of the Co. Councils; it depends solely on the workers on the guild job", the general opinion was rather that "the Building Guild in Dublin depends on the amount of sympathy that is for the Guild in the Dublin Corporation".

Committed to "Parliamentary Democracy", the Irish Labour Party abandoned the idea of revolution. The tide of social revolution had passed the flood; its ebb bared the sands on which Irish Labour had been striving to rear an edifice fit for the abode of heroes. While the new Constitution was still in abeyance the Provisional Government incurred sharp criticism from Congress delegates. As L. J. Duffy, who had been elected Vice-Chairman of the incoming National Executive, put it:

One of the things this alleged freedom has brought to Ireland is the most desirable freedom to scrap everything calculated to benefit or improve the condition of the working classes of this country. The Fair Wages Resolution has been wholly and utterly scrapped. The Irish Government is importing from abroad the cheapest articles they can get, irrespective of the conditions under which they are made. In giving contracts they have absolutely and definitely refused to insist that these contracts will be carried out under fair conditions. We have interviewed several Ministers of the Government, and asked them to insist that articles contracted for and used in their

National Executive will consider the possibility of appointing a sub-committee", however, the N. E. Report for 1922-23 contained no reference to the matter; a further proposal to the same end was definitely turned down at a Special Congress in March, 1924; *cf.* also the section on Trade Union Policy of the N. E. Report for 1923-1924.

departments shall be performed under fair conditions by Trade Union labour, but these Ministers have refused and turned down our request.<sup>1</sup>

Nor did the resumption of Parliamentary government improve the situation. The Dail did not meet until September 9, but the Labour members did not resign. With one exception,<sup>2</sup> they took the oath required by the Constitution, which went into effect on December 6, 1922. Moreover, though Congress had in past years "condemned Second Chambers in any legislative assembly set up"<sup>3</sup> in Ireland, five members of the Labour Party, with the approval of the N. E., accepted election to the Seanad. The record of the Labour Party in the Provisional Parliament had been a series of defeats. In the constitutional Oireachtas, despite the indefatigable energy of Thomas Johnson, the Labour Party constituted nothing more than a slight "check on the tendency toward 'mad-dog legislation'". Even Mr. Duffy, in his presidential address to Congress in 1923, could find no more adequate grounds for his "modest pride in contemplating the achievements of the Labour Deputies" than that "they, at any rate, breathed into the assembly a spirit of humanity and understanding, when all was dark and passion-swept" and that "the Labour Group in Dail Eireann kept the faith shining when the other parties would extinguish it".

Ground down by the upper millstone of a Government that had merely transferred its seat "from Westminster to Leinster Lawn", the leaders of Irish Labour were menaced with destruction on the nether millstone of Jim Larkin, re-

<sup>1</sup> 1922 Report, p. 252: "Let us come back, at any rate to where we were before the truce, and see there is no sweating."

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Gaffney, T. D. for Carlow-Kilkenny. Gaffney ran again in 1923 as an independent Labour Republican, but was defeated.

<sup>3</sup> A resolution condemning the Labour Senators was rejected by the 1923 Congress by a vote of 110 to 14. Cf. 1923 Report, pp. 94-95.

turned from his prolonged sojourn in America. Arriving at Southampton on April 27, 1923, "he was met by his sister and eldest brother, and by members of the revolutionary Old Guard of Dublin", and by a representative of the Communist Party of Great Britain, whose official organ heartily tendered to the returned pioneer "the welcome of all the revolutionary workers in these islands".<sup>1</sup> In marked contrast, the *Voice of Labour* was content to chronicle Larkin's arrival in Dublin on April 30, as follows:

Jim Larkin, General Secretary, I. T. & G. W. U., arrived in Dublin on Monday evening to resume his work in the Union. He was met by a large crowd at the station and escorted to Liberty Hall, where he made his first speech to an Irish audience after an absence of eight and a-half years.<sup>2</sup>

Grave fears had been current "about what Larkin would do on his return". It was noticed that neither William O'Brien, General Treasurer of the Union, nor any of the other Labour members of the Dail, although they were in Dublin at the time, had gone to welcome him. Larkin's request, cabled from New York, for the advance of £5,000 to purchase a "food ship" for the relief of distress in Belfast, had been rejected by the Executive Committee.

Yet at first all seemed well. "Apparently not recognising the changes that had taken place in the spirit and structure of the Union", Larkin was persuaded by a meeting of the E. C., "called for the purpose of according the General Secretary an opportunity of meeting the members of the E. C. after his long absence in America", to withdraw his resignation from official position in the Transport Union. With relief the *Voice of Labour* announced: "'Be not concerned with personalities! Concern yourselves not with men, but with principles', says the General Secretary." On

<sup>1</sup>*The Workers' Weekly*, May 5, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>*Voice of Labour*, May 5, 1923.

May 14 the Delegate Conference, adjourned from April 25 to give the delegates an opportunity of hearing their General Secretary himself explain the "food ship" business, passed off without serious hitch; Larkin "quoted for them the guiding principle of the Jesuits: 'In things essential, unity; in things doubtful, liberty; but in all things, charity'".

"Unity" was, however, no more to be attained between Larkin and his Executive than between the rival forces in the Dail the year before. On June 3, at a General Meeting of No. 1 Branch members at La Scala Theatre, Dublin, "called so that the Branch members could meet the General Secretary", the light of day was let in on the sources of conflict. At a meeting on June 5 Larkin broke definitively with the E. C. on the question of the amended rules of the Union; from the E. C. he appealed to the rank and file. At a meeting of No. 3 Branch, held in the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, on Sunday, June 10, 1923, it was moved and seconded, at Larkin's suggestion, that Thomas Kennedy, member of the E. C. and Acting General Treasurer, "be suspended from the Union pending full investigations being made" into the charges against him. "Almost every member present put their hands up, and Mr. Larkin declared the motion carried." Later on the same day, "at an illegally summoned meeting of Dublin No. 1 Branch, called by himself", Larkin similarly secured the suspension from the Union of Thomas Foran, General President, William O'Brien, General Treasurer, Michael McCarthy, another member of the E. C., and John O'Neill, Secretary of No. 1 Branch.<sup>1</sup> The following day Larkin's followers seized the

<sup>1</sup> The Branch Secretary, apparently afraid to face his members, had refused to call a legal meeting. The foregoing account of the quarrel is based on *The Attempt to Smash the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union*, a source extremely hostile to Larkin. The account of the several meetings is taken from the official minutes as printed in appendices to the document just mentioned.

Union offices and excluded the suspended officials from the premises.

Thus was launched the civil war between the partisans of action and the advocates of caution. Disregarding not only the irregular action of No. 1 Branch, but the legal action of No. 3 Branch as well, the Executive Committee stood fast: on June 11, 1923 they retaliated by suspending Jim Larkin from office as General Secretary. Then followed a series of spectacular events, heralded by the application of O'Brien, Kennedy, and Foran for an injunction to restrain Mr. Larkin, "his agents and servants . . . from unlawfully entering upon and taking forcible possession of" Liberty Hall and the Union offices in Parnell Square, and the appearance of a new weekly paper, *The Irish Worker*, edited by Jim Larkin. Attended by the bitterest personalities, the quarrel developed rapidly. Excluded from representation at the annual Congress held in Dublin in August, 1923, Larkinite supporters resorted indiscriminately to legal proceedings and hatpins in the effort to break up its deliberations.

In these circumstances the Labour Party entered the "Green Election" at the end of August, 1923, under a heavy handicap. The country was still in the atmosphere of civil war. "The Free Stater", commented the *Voice of Labour*, "is too busy rattling his revolver and threatening his opponents to sound a noble call, while the Republican grips his hidden weapon and broods vengeance against the Free Stater as being the source of Ireland's ills."<sup>1</sup> Two-thirds of the first preferences were cast for one or other of the two purely political parties; Cumann na nGaedhéal secured sixty seats and the Republican Party forty of the total of 150 seats in Dail Eireann. The Labour Party had nominated forty-three candidates, contesting all but three of

the twenty-nine constituencies. Only fourteen were returned; four of the candidates, though they had been members of the third Dail, were not reelected.<sup>1</sup> The Larkinites took no regular part in the electoral contest and had nothing positive to show in the results.<sup>2</sup>

The internal affairs of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union went from bad to worse. Litigation was countered by litigation. The crisis came on with the trial of the Consolidated Actions in February, 1924. Judgment was delivered against Larkin. On March 14 he was expelled from membership in the Union by unanimous vote of the E.C.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in the early autumn of 1923, Larkin had founded an "Irish Workers' League".<sup>4</sup> The Communist Party was exploded a few weeks later; the *Workers' Republic* ceased publication; the *Irish Worker* was left alone to continue its violent onslaughts on the personalities and policies of the accredited labour leaders. On July 15, 1924, during Larkin's absence in Russia,<sup>5</sup> the rules of the "Workers' Union of Ireland" were duly registered; its offices in Marlboro' Street, Dublin, were christened "Unity Hall". A large proportion of the Dublin membership of

<sup>1</sup> These four were Wm. O'Brien, General Treasurer of the Transport Union, C O'Shannon, some-time editor of the *Voice of Labour*, Robert Day, who had topped the poll in his constituency in 1922; and D. O'Callaghan. At the same time, it should be noted that the Farmers' Party, which had nominated 66 candidates, won only 15 seats.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the returns, see 1923 Report, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. correspondence in *Voice of Labour*, Mar. 22, 1924; cf. also *ibid.*, Mar 1, 1924

<sup>4</sup> This organisation had undertaken to supply its members with necessary commodities at much less than current market prices; cf table of prices, *The Irish Worker*, Feb. 23, 1924

<sup>5</sup> In Moscow Larkin was elected sole representative from the British Isles on the Red Trade Union International, he brought back a red banner, suitably inscribed, as a gift from the transport workers of Moscow to the revolutionary transport workers of Dublin.

the I. T. & G. W. U., including the dockers—ever the section of the greatest strategical importance—transferred their membership to the old leader's new union. Dublin has again been familiarised with industrial struggles; strike has followed strike.<sup>1</sup> Through all the turmoil has run the cut-throat competition of the rival unions, each seeking to compass its enemy's destruction.<sup>2</sup> The Irish labour movement, thus disrupted, has steadily declined in prestige.

The Free State Government, unlike the Northern Government, makes no profession of what it is doing for Labour. The attempt to draw up a statement on that head would, indeed, strain the intellectual resources of even the professionals of Leinster Lawn. The Free State inherited the preexisting social legislation of the Westminster Parliament. But the Government of the Free State, far from vying with the Northern Government in an effort to adopt every subsequent improvement in this field—much less seeking to initiate improvements of its own—has entered on a retrograde course. Though the British Unemployment Insurance Act of 1922 was applied to the Free State by an Order in Council,<sup>3</sup> the first Irish Unemployment Insurance Act withdrew "uncovenanted benefit".

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the chiefest of these, see "The Municipal Strike—Its History and Significance", *Irish Worker*, Aug. 9, 1924. Thanks to the firm stand of the new union's 400 members engaged in this strike, and despite President Cosgrave's threats, the proposed wage-cut of 6s. was reduced to 2s. and its application postponed for three months.

<sup>2</sup> The Transport Union, in common with most of the other old-established unions, has taken the stand that the Workers' Union of Ireland is not a "recognised" trade union and has consequently consistently authorised its members to take the places of striking members of the new union. The *Irish Worker* affirmed (Aug. 23, 1924): "We do not carry enmity of the Transport Executive down to the rank and file. We are not going to ask our members to act as scabs on Transport strikers and thereby follow the example of the Transport Executive."

<sup>3</sup> Provisional Government Decrees No. 4 and No. 6.



The position has, therefore, been that since October, 1923, Unemployment Insurance has been administered under the full rigour of the Act of 1920, although in Great Britain and the Six Counties the cruel absurdity of this course has been recognised by the Governments there. As a result of the Government's policy a very large number of workers—how large it is impossible to estimate, but it must run into many thousands—after having suffered acutely from unemployment over a period of many months, or even years, have been left without even the meagre relief afforded by Unemployment Benefit.<sup>1</sup>

The pressing problem of unemployment and the necessity of seeking some solution were repeatedly forced upon the attention of the Ministers by the Labour deputies in the Dail. The extent of the Government's action was to vote a grant to be expended through the Local Government Department on road work. Ministers gave assurances that, while it was not possible to comply with the Labour Party's "demand to pay the standard rate for the road-workers, they would be something above the usual rate for casual agricultural workers". But

this assurance has since been wholly ignored. . . . There is now clear evidence that the Minister for Local Government, who has the support of the Executive Council and the majority of the Dail, having succeeded in fixing very low rates of wages for workers employed on road schemes, is utilising those low wages as an argument for the reduction of the standard rate of wages paid to workers in the permanent employment of local authorities.<sup>2</sup>

In other directions, too, the Government has lent point to the gibe of the Republicans that *Saor Stat na h-Eireann*,

<sup>1</sup> N. E. Report for 1923-1924, pp. 8-9. All the statements made in this chapter about the policy of the Free State Government have been confirmed by the officials in charge of the administrative work in conversation in their offices.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

properly translated, means "Cheap State of Ireland".<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Old Age Pension Act of 1924 scaled down the rate of payment and at the same time restricted the application of the Act. The British and Irish schedules may be reproduced for comparison:

*British*<sup>2</sup>

Where the yearly means of the  
claimant or pensioner as calculated  
under the Old Age Pension Acts,

	£	s.	d.	do not exceed	£	s.	d.	Rate of Pension Per Week
exceed	26	5	0	but	26	5	0	10s.
"	31	10	0	"	31	10	0	8s.
"	36	15	0	"	36	15	0	6s.
"	42	0	0	"	42	0	0	4s.
"	47	5	0	"	47	5	0	2s.
"	49	17	6	"	49	17	6	1s.
"	49	17	6	...	...	...	...	No pension.

*Irish*<sup>3</sup>

	£	s.	d.	do not exceed	£	s.	d.	
exceed	18	5	0	but	18	5	0	9s.
"	20	17	6	"	20	17	6	8s.
"	23	10	0	"	23	10	0	7s.
"	26	2	6	"	26	2	6	6s.
"	28	15	0	"	28	15	0	5s.
"	31	7	6	"	31	7	6	4s.
"	34	0	0	"	34	0	0	3s.
"	36	12	6	"	36	12	6	2s.
"	39	5	0	.....	39	5	0	1s.
"	39	5	0	.....	.....	.....	.....	no pension.

<sup>1</sup> This does not refer to the expenditure on the Governor-General or to the cost of living. On the latter score the Ministry of Industry and Commerce has published the following table.

	1922			1923			1924		
	Jan.	Apr.	July	Oct.	Jan.	Apr.	July	Oct.	Jan.
Saorstát Éireann.. —	191	185	189		190	181	180	186	188
Great Britain ....	192	182	184	178	178	174	169	175	177
Basis: July, 1914=100.									

<sup>2</sup> First Schedule, attached to Old Age Pensions Act, 1919 (9 & 10 Geo. 5. Ch. 102).

Almost simultaneously the British Parliament amended the Act of 1919 to permit claimants to deduct £39 from their income, other than earnings, before the rate of pension was calculated; subject to this deduction, the schedule of rates given above remains unaltered.<sup>1</sup> The Irish Act, on the other hand, provided for upward revision of the method of calculating the yearly value of a pensioner's property. The Irish Labour Party calculated that "the effect of this is that whereas it has been possible for a person who owns property valued at anything up to £711 to get a pension (1/-per week in the extreme case), in future no person who owns property valued at more than £417 10s. od. will be able to get a pension at all".<sup>2</sup> This measure is peculiarly significant in the light of the well-established fact that savings can be better effected by rigorous administration than by legislative enactment; under the circumstances the Act added insult to injury to Ireland's aged poor.

Similarly, though both the Westminster and the Belfast Parliaments improved their Workmen's Compensation Acts, the Free State has been content to continue temporarily the British legislation which increased the compensation payable to injured workmen and their dependents, but has not seen fit permanently to amend the Act it inherited.

The National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress has summed up the Government's policy as follows: "While, up to the present, no action whatever has been taken in regard to high prices and high profits, the Government have given direct encouragement to drastic reductions in wages."<sup>3</sup> The Irish Government has given practical effect to none of the high ideals that permeated the utterances of the leaders throughout the pro-

<sup>1</sup> Circular 521, Ministry of Health, Whitehall (Aug 8, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> N. E. Report for 1923-1924, p. 30

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

longed struggle for national freedom; it has been tersely, but admirably characterised as "a heavy-handed heavy-taxing capitalistic regime".

From the Republican Party, as at present constituted, nothing better is to be looked for. Dwelling inanely on what they are pleased to call the Great Betrayal of 1922, Republicans avoid the necessity of formulating an alternative programme. Countess Constance de Markievicz is enthusiastically, but not over-intelligently engaged in attempting to revive, through the medium of the *Glasgow Forward* and of "Socialist" lectures at Republican headquarters in Suffolk Street, Connolly's interpretation of Irish history; with peculiar but characteristic emphasis, she has seized on his quite untenable hypothesis of the Gaelic State as the keynote to which to pitch the recital of his great epic.<sup>1</sup> In March, 1924, the Standing Committee of Sinn Féin published its "Economic Programme", a perfectly childish adaptation of the vague "Democratic Programme" adopted by Dail Eireann at its first meeting, January 21, 1919, in the Mansion House, Dublin.<sup>2</sup> Though Republicans loudly profess their Labour sympathies in Dublin, Miss Mary MacSwiney, at the recent general election to the Westminster Parliament, canvassed West Belfast for a Republican candidate rather than make common cause with the Labour opposition to the Unionist nominee. Just as Eamon de Valera, on his release by the Free State authorities in August, 1924, could think of nothing more constructive than the comic resumption of his "interrupted" speech at Ennis, the Republican Party has been unable to absorb the concept of

<sup>1</sup> Mme. Markievicz improves on Connolly in her fervent desire to overthrow what she calls the present "Feudal Capitalist State".

<sup>2</sup> For a ruthless dissection of the "Economic Programme", see the *Irish Statesman*, Aug. 16, 1924.

social freedom as more fundamental than political freedom. Doctrinaire political principles still hold supreme sway.

It is in itself a significant commentary upon the subordinate place allotted to labour in Irish politics that a writer should think it necessary to explain his purpose before setting out to detail for the benefit of his readers the position of the Irish workers in the past, and the lessons to be derived from a study of that position in guiding the movement of the working class to-day. Were history what it ought to be, an accurate literary reflex of the times with which it professes to deal, the pages of history would be almost entirely engrossed with a recital of the wrongs and struggles of the labouring people, constituting, as they have ever done, the vast mass of mankind. But history, in general, treats the working class as the manipulator of politics treats the working man—that is to say with contempt when he remains passive, and with derision, hatred and misrepresentation when he dares evince a desire to throw off the yoke of political or social servitude. Ireland is no exception to the rule.<sup>1</sup>

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made (1) to indicate the successive stages through which the working class has passed in modern Ireland and (2) to correlate its development with the well-known story of Ireland's struggle for nationhood. Several well-marked stages stand out in retrospect.

In the eighteenth century Irish artisans, in common with the members of their class throughout Western Europe, were confronted with a crop of serious abuses arising from the decay of the medieval craft guilds; in the effort to combat those evils, combinations of journeymen sought to restore in their pristine vigour and efficacy the familiar features of the guild organisation of industry; particularly the prohibi-

<sup>1</sup> Connolly, *Labour in Ireland*, pp. 1-2.

tion of employment of those who had not passed through a regular apprenticeship; and limitations on the taking of apprentices.

The guilds proved incapable of rejuvenation; through the entering wedge of the domestic system capitalism was fastening its grip on industry. In the midst of their effort to repair the ravages of time, the artisans were overtaken by the Industrial Revolution. Fearful as were the consequences in other countries, the peculiar conditions of Irish economic life intensified the resultant misery of the Irish working class. In the first part of the nineteenth century, then, Irish artisans and labourers were driven to desperation; in the enforcement of negative remedies, principally limitation of the taking of apprentices, fixation of minimum wage-rates, and refusal to work with "free labour", the bewildered combiners saw their sole salvation.

This sombre background of Irish life was thrown into stronger relief, not relieved, by the brilliant ideals of nineteenth-century nationalists. Unenlightened as to the true nature and origin of the suffering they saw about them, partly perhaps unconscious of its very existence, Irish patriots and Irish politicians could not fairly be expected to work out any programme in remedy of the distress of the working class of Ireland. One stock panacea they had—how hollow only time could tell—with which to beckon the workers on; the political liberation of Ireland from England—a sovereign cure for all the ills Irishmen were heirs to.

Quite apart from the national struggle, proceeded gradually the organisation of the workers into trade unions; aided by the improvement of communications and by the advantages that their less depressed standards gave them, English labour organisations steadily extended their influence to Ireland. Slowly and painfully the working class recovered some of the ground it had lost in the first onrush of the

Industrial Revolution. But this petty progress was accompanied by the loss of its old feeling of independence; it was achieved at the expense of accepting the station to which the God of Liberalism had called them.

Thoroughly imbued with capitalist philosophy, the Irish working class gradually came consciously to imitate the political ideology of the master class; the workers flocked to the rival banners of the middle-class politicians. At the end of the century Irish workers formed their own Trades Union Congress, independent of the British; as the infant gained in strength and self-consciousness, it tended to become an adjunct of the Home Rule Party. For almost a score of years the anomalous situation continued: the Irish Labour Movement was interlocked with and dependent on the British, just as Irish politics were interlocked with and dependent on British politics; yet, both in the labour movement and in politics, there existed an organisation good-naturedly hostile to the Union. So long as the "old unionism" held sway, labour philosophy and labour politics were but a reflection of bourgeois philosophy and bourgeois politics.

But, with the coming of the "new unionism", the Irish working class awoke to a new consciousness of its position. A distinctive labour ideology seeped into the numb frame of Irish Labour; the nether members stirred and roused the upper to a new activity. A novel sense of power provoked high ambitions. In the light of new ideals, organisation, programme, and policy were radically revised. Fortified by self-reliance, the Irish working class set to work with a will to freshen the stagnant Irish labour movement and bring it to the level of the labour movement in other countries.

Meanwhile a new factor had come into being in Irish politics. Sinn Fein, under the aegis of Arthur Griffith, was preaching a more vigorous prosecution of Ireland's demand for nationhood. But the circle to which Sinn Fein appealed

was a narrow one, and contained no elements of strength that could hold out hope of high achievement. For the working class of Ireland the new school of theoreticians had no more to offer—and with less excuse for the omission—than their predecessors of the nineteenth century. The leaders trusted by the workers were subjected to severe castigation by the archangel of Sinn Féin. In vain, a handful of litterateurs strove to soften their leader's attitude to the aims and aspirations of Labour; even their efforts to convert Griffith to Republicanism could not avail to budge him one iota from his chosen ground.

Not until the War had strengthened the hands of the extremists was any rapprochement possible between the apostles of Nationalism and their necessary fighting force, the working class. By that time the labour movement, which Jim Larkin had infused with the new spirit, had passed under the direction of James Connolly. Through him the revolutionary spirit of the Irish working class reached its apotheosis. The fusion between the material strength of the revolutionary workers and the exalted ideals of the republican nationalists eventuated in the ecstasy of Easter Week.

The suppression of the Rising and the elimination of all the competent leaders of the revolutionists were followed by a drifting apart of Labour and the Nationalists. Sinn Féin, which had had no part nor lot in the Rising, was driven by the logic of necessity to take up the heritage of the men it had spurned when living. Sinn Féin scrapped both policy and programme and assumed republican guise. Labour, for its part, drew back; under the leadership of men who, though friends of Connolly, had not fully shared his views, it turned its face to the task of trade-union reorganisation. Yet, throughout the remainder of the War and the Terror after the War, the Irish working class, both



through its own organisations and through the military force organised by the political nationalists, continued its energetic participation in the struggle for national independence. But the place it had earned in the counsels of the Nation had been voluntarily surrendered; nor was any effort made to resume that place.

Far other has been the history of the working class in Belfast. Driven forward by more intimate contact with advanced thought across the Channel, plunged backward by artful manipulation of politico-sectarian issues, the labour movement in the North has had a chequered career. To-day its material welfare is safeguarded by a mass of legislation, but from the control of its own destinies the working class in the Six Counties is debarred.

British Labour, guided by an unerring instinct of self-preservation, has long interested itself in the affairs of the Irish working class. By the attraction of its superior wealth and power, it drew Irish workers into its own organisations. But support to Irish trade unionists engaged in industrial disputes has ever been conditioned by certain considerations, viz., that British interests be at stake in the dispute. Politically, British Labour's neglect of the aspirations of the Irish working class has been naked and unashamed. Succumbing to the temptation of securing the votes of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the British Labour Party ignored the protests of Irish Labour and persisted in accepting the Redmondites as the spokesmen of the working class of Ireland. With the peculiar aspirations of revolutionary Irish workers British Labour has never betrayed the slightest sympathy.

Left to its own resources and unsure of its footing Irish Labour took no official part in the decision to establish the Irish Free State. By the official leaders of the Irish working class the belief in revolutionary action has been abandoned. The political nationalists, once in power, have made

haste to jettison their working-class allies. In the last few years the exigencies of civil strife, both in the country at large and in the labour movement itself, have facilitated the return of the pre-war ideology. The working class, whose leaders have betrayed a deplorable absence of constructive thought, has lapsed into its former status as scapegoat for the Nation's sins. For Irish Labour there seems no other course but to revert to the policy enunciated in the first issue of the war-time *Workers' Republic*:

Our great work now is to consolidate our ranks, to educate our members, to lay broad and deep the foundations of a great Labour movement in this country, and to think out and propound the plans by which we hope to make it possible for that movement to enter into the possession of a regenerated Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Workers' Republic*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1 (May 20, 1915).

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## INDEX

- Aberdeen, Lady, 220  
 Aberdeen, Lord, 221  
 Abraham, W., 178  
 Æ, see Russell, G. W.  
 Aggregate meeting, 117-118, 137, 138  
 Ammon, 409  
 Amsterdam Conference, 335-336  
 Ancient Order of Hibernians, 238, 254, 306, 307  
 Anderson, 410  
 Andrews, J. M., 373-375, 386  
 Arch, Joseph, 182, 390  
 Arigna, 435-436  
 Articles of Agreement, 21, 314, 342, 343, 443, 450, 452, 455-450, 457-458  
 Ashley, Lord, 82, 136  
 Athlone, 191; see also Irish Trades Union Congress (1906)  
  
 Baird, Dan, 198-199  
 Baker, H. R., 135  
 Ballinagarry, 159  
 Barnes, G. N., 291  
 Barrett, Constable, 218  
 Belfast, industrial, 22-24, 63-64, 70, 344-345, 353, in labour movement, 178, 181, 184, 191, 194, 195-196, 347-349, 353, 391-392, 397, 399-400, 477; sectarianism, 90, 127, 128, 133, 203, 345-347, 353-354  
 Belfast expulsions (1920), 362-373, 424-432  
 Belfast Labour Party, 351-352, 376-378, 386, 414, 426  
 Belfast Protestant Association, 346, 352, 367  
 Belfast Socialist Party, 213, 350, 351  
 Belfast Trades Council, 184, 348; and British Labour, 188, 207, 392, 393, 395, 401, and elections, 349, 350, 351, 401; and Home Rule, 299, 400, and Irish Trades Union Congress, 493]
- 191, 200, 206, and Larkinism, 226, 229, 270  
 Bennett, J. H., 333, 376  
 Bennett, Miss L., 460-461  
 Berne Conference, 327-328, 335, 339, 412  
 Blacam, Aodh de, 450, 452  
 Blatchford, 263  
 Blythe, E., 287  
 Board of Green Cloth, 27, 99, 110, 115-116  
 Boer War, 256, 263, 279  
 Bowerman, 409  
 Bowman, Alex., 181-182, 185, 106, 197, 349, 391  
 Brady, Alice, 309  
 Brannigan, R., 303  
 Bricklayers, Friendly Society of Operative, 77, 93, 103-104, 114  
 Bricklayers, Old Body of, 93, 103, 114  
 British Labour, see Independent Labour Party, Labour Party, Trades Union Congress, etc.  
 Burn, T. H., 374  
 Burns, John, 361  
 Butt, Isaac, 20, 21, 162  
 Byrne, 309  
  
 Cabinet-makers, 75-76, 77, 104, 116-117  
 Cameron, Sir Charles, 30  
 Campbell, B., 376  
 Campbell, D. R., 295, 299, 314, 325, 333, 334, 383  
 Campbell, James, 94  
 Carolan, E., 77, 80, 82, 85, 116  
 Carolan, M., 376  
 Carolin, E., see Carolan, E.  
 Carpenters (Dublin), 71-72, 75, 77, 101-103, 105-107, 109, 114, 220-221  
 Carpenters, General Society of, 114  
 Carpenters, General Union of, 191

- Carpenters & Joiners, Amalgamated Society of, 166, 178, 190, 191, 195, 321, 351, 400, 427-430  
 Carrigshock massacre, 134  
 Carson, Sir Edward (Lord Carson of Duncairn), 364-365, 367-368, 369, 371-372, 373-375, 400  
 Carters' strike, Belfast, 216-219, 267, 353; Dublin, 220-221, 267-268  
 Castledawson pogrom, 361  
 Catholicism, 17-18, 32, 48, 90-92, 94, 217, 347, 354, 362, 363, 365-366, 368-169, 370-371, 372, attitude toward Labour, 29-32, 238  
 Catholic Emancipation, 17, 133, 283  
 Ceannt, E., 274-275  
 Chambers, James, 199, 212  
 Chandlers' Society, 173  
 Chartism, 144, 145-146, 161  
 Christie, James, 135  
 Church of Ireland, 17, 29  
 Citizen Army, see Irish Citizen Army  
 Clark, (Sir) G. S., 352  
 Clarke, Tom, 285, 311  
 Clerical Workers, Irish, 322  
 Clonmel, 184, 191, 194, 290; see also I. T. U. C. (1912)  
 Clyde, 24, 65, 413-414  
 Clynes, J. R., 371  
 Coachmakers, 168, 191  
 Coal, 23, 38, 435  
 Coalmen (Belfast), 217-218  
 Coal Merchants' Association (Dublin), 235  
 Coercion, 19, 132, 389  
 College Green Election, 306  
 Collins, Michael, 457  
 Combination Laws, 27, 65, 72, 100, 118  
 Committee on Combinations (1838), 143  
 Communists, 151, 152, 176, 274, 456  
 Communist Party of Great Britain, 464  
 Communist Party of Ireland, 213, 455, 467  
 Connary, Peter, 95  
 Connolly, James, and British Labour, 294, 305-306, 410, 434; and the Church, 31-32; and Citizen Army, 288, 297, 300, 301-304; early activities, 208-213, 250, 252, 256, 259, 301, 349; and Easter Week, 309-312, 313-314, 316, 451, 453, 476; and Irish labour movement, 212, 231-232, 241, 246, 248, 288, 292, 293, 297, 300, 304-305, 316-317, 319, 327, 329, 330, 353, 445, 476, philosophy of, 209, 211, 232-235, 293, 320, 459, 473; and politicians, 250, 256, 259, 271, 275, 282, 298, 299, 311-312, 336, 449, 451-452, 453-454, 472; and Great War, 300-301, 307-309, 453, writings of, 210-212, 271, 282, 334, 354, 359, 445, 472  
 Connolly, Nora, 452  
 Connolly, Roderic, 213  
 Conscriptio, 307, 330-333, 410-411  
 Coombe, 54, 106, 263, 443  
 Coopers, Regular Operative Society of, 178; Belfast, 186  
 Cooperation, 287, 295  
 Cooperative Wholesale Society, 405  
 Cootie, 391  
 Corish, R., 449  
 Cork, 18, 23, 40-42, 55, 63, 64, 342, 344, 442; in labour movement, 28, 99, 184, 190, 194, 195, 220, 347; see also I. T. U. C. (1895, 1902, 1913)  
 Cork Constitution, 223, 224  
 Cork strike (1909), 223-227, 239, 270  
 Cork Trades Council, 184, 224, 226, 269, 270, 298  
 Corkcutters, 172  
 Corporation workmen (Dublin), 268, 315  
 Cosgrave, W., 468  
 Counter-Terror, 432  
 Courtney, H., 109  
 Cox, Sir Richard, 36, 40, 42, 43  
 Craig, Sir James, 372, 386-387  
 Criminal, 282, 284  
 Croydon Park, 302-303  
 Cumann na nGaedheal, 205, 264, 395, 449, 466  
 Dail Eireann, 342, 438, 440, 443, 446-447, 449, 450, 457, 460, 463, 466-467, 472  
 Daily Citizen, 405

- Daly, P. T., 196, 205, 206, 228, 231, 240-241, 275, 289, 291, 300, 303, 314, 402, 403, 406  
 Daly, Thomas, 92, 109, 114  
 Darcus, C., 399  
 Darcy, Wm., 94, 95-96  
 Davidson, see Sirocco  
 Davis, Thomas, 146-148, 156, 159, 267  
 Davitt, Michael, 104, 130, 133, 157, 162, 163, 182, 238, 250, 390  
 Day, Robert, 467  
 Deane, E., 205  
 De Leon, Daniel, 213  
 Democratic Programme of Sinn Féin, 438, 472  
 Dempsey, J., 349  
 Derry, see Londonderry  
 De Valera, E., 162, 336-337, 376, 440, 452, 457, 472  
 Devlin, J., 253-255, 290-291, 352, 367-368, 372, 374, 376, 378  
 Diggen, Francis, 106  
 Dillon, J., 238, 250, 290-291  
 Dinneen, S., 228  
 Distributive Workers' Union, 322  
 Dixon, Sir Daniel, 351-352  
 Dock Labourers, National Union of, 191, 215-219, 220-221, 229, 230, 231, 269  
 Doherty, John, 136  
 Donald, Thompson, 374  
 Doyle, Dr., 135  
 Drapers' Assistant's Association, Irish, 166, 321, 322, 323  
 Drapers' Assistants' Trade Union, 165-166  
 Drogheda, 63, 64, 184, 191, 194, 290; see I. L. P. & T. U. C. (1919)  
 Dublin, 18, 30, 55, 247-248, 442-444; industries, 22, 23, 42, 43, 47, 48, 62-64, 344; in labour movement, 28, 99, 177-178, 184, 190, 194, 195-196, 347, 392  
 Dublin Building Guild, 462  
 Dublin Castle, 129, 223, 235, 282, 313, 341  
 Dublin Corporation, 242, 257, 258-259, 443, 444, 462  
 Dublin Labour Party, 206, 212, 257, 258, 314  
 Dublin lock-out of 1913, 242-248, 276-281, 285-287, 293, 302, 304, 307-308, 404  
 Dublin Six, 254, 255  
 Dublin & Southeastern Railway, 237, 238, 304  
 Dublin Trades Council, 178, 184, 188, 257, 268; and British Labour, 393, 395, 401, and elections, 206, 212, 231, 306; and Irish Trades Union Congress, 191, 289; and La kinism, 226, 244, 269, 270  
 Dublin Trades Political Union, 135, 137-138  
 Duffy, L. J., 462-463  
 Duignan, J. T., 204  
 Duke, Irish Secretary, 330  
 Dundalk, 184, 290, see also I. T. U. C. (1910)  
 Dunne, Colonel, 175  
 Easter Week, 309-312, 315, 316, 319, 335, 336, 409-410, 453, 476  
 Eaton, B., 80, 118  
 Egan, Michael, 228, 298  
 Elections, 93, 175-176, 233, Belfast, 349, 351-352, 374-375, 376-379, Free State, 457-459, 466-467; local, 250, 342, 397, Belfast, 350 376, 386-387, Dublin, 206, 212-213, 257-259; policy of Irish Labour Party, 297, 306, 337-338, 342-343, 440, 448-449, 457-459  
 Emmet, Robert, 20, 127, 129, 132  
 Employers' Federation, Cork, 224, 226, 227  
 Employers' Federation Ltd., Dublin, 31, 243-246, 275, 293, 300, 313  
 Engineers, Amalgamated Society of, 166, 321, 323, 364  
 Engineering & Shipbuilding Trades, Federation of, 363-364, 427, 430  
 Engineering, Shipbuilding, & Foundry Trades Union, Irish, 323  
 Ennis, 171, 183, 472  
 Enniskillen, 171  
 Ewart, W., 349  
 Fabian Society, 207-208, 397  
 Fagan, 63, 73, 79, 94, 118  
 Falls Road, 218-219, 378  
 Farmers' Union, 458, 467  
 Farrell, Michael, 112, 116, 119

- Farrell, Patrick, 75, 77, 102, 106, 116, 117  
 Fearon, 225, 302  
 Fenians, 20, 126, 159-162, 162-163, 176, 203, 208  
 Field, Wm., 201, 250  
 Finlay, F. D., 67, 86-90, 93-94, 109, 347  
 Fitzgerald, Lord Edward, 129  
 Flanagan, 344  
 Flood, H., 126  
 Food control, 329-330  
 Foran, T., 303, 317-318, 329, 330, 334, 435-436, 456, 461, 465, 466  
*Forward*, 472  
 Foundry Workers' Union, Irish, 241  
*Freeman's Journal*, 161, 174, 236, 238, 262, 313, 340  
 Free State, see Saorstát Éireann  
 Free Staters, 441, 459, 466  
 French, Lord, 180, 331-332, 340  
 French Revolution, 127-128, 162  
 Friends of Irish Freedom, 440  
  
 Gaelic League, 256, 260, 264, 275, 277  
 Gaffney, Patrick, 463  
 Gageby, Robert, 216, 352  
 Gallagher, Frank, 451  
 Galway, 18, 171, 290, 344, 347; see I. T. U. C. (1911)  
 Galway, Mary, 228  
 General Federation of Trade Unions, 204-205, 218, 219, 229, 395  
 General strike, 331, 340, 456  
 George, David Lloyd, 242, 318, 341, 417, 418, 419  
 George, Henry, 157, 162, 349  
 Ginnell, L., 162  
 Gladstone, W. E., 18, 19, 21, 346  
 Glennon, 400-401  
 Glovers, 110  
 Glovers and Skinners, Corporation of, 48, 90  
 Gompers, S., 196  
 Gonne, Maud, 256  
 Gordon, D., 295  
 Gosling, H., 419, 424  
 Goulding, 238, 239  
 Government of Ireland Bill, 289-291, 298-299, 342, 375, 401, 403, 408, 440  
 Graham, Charles, 75, 77, 117-118  
 Grant, W., 372-373, 374  
 Grattan, 126, 256  
 Grattan's Parliament, 52, 54, 58, 91, 126  
 Graves, Inspector, 350, 360  
 Great Northern Railway, 370, 423  
 Great Southern & Western Railway, 224, 237  
 Great War, 246, 297, 300, 316, 329, 362, 409, 453, 476  
 Green Election, 466-467  
 Greenwood, Sir Hamar, 364, 367, 388  
 Greig, George, 204, 228  
 Griffith, Arthur, 162, 210, 221, 238, 256-281, 336, 395, 440-441, 447, 452, 456, 459, 475-476  
 Grimley, J., 386  
 Grimshaw, T., 70-71, 78, 100-110  
 Grocers' & Vintners' Association, Irish, 322  
 Guinness, 95, 143, 172, 176, 196  
  
 Hall, Frederick, 300  
 Hall, William, 65, 77, 118-119  
 Hanna, Rev. Hugh, 340  
 Hardie, Keir, 198, 210, 398, 402, 406  
 Hardy, P. D., 66-69, 82-83, 92, 105, 118  
 Harland & Wolff, 24, 364, 368, 427, 428, 429  
*Harp*, 213  
 Hatters, 72, 110, 112-113, 117  
 Healy, Timothy, 246, 291  
 Henderson, Arthur, 291, 327, 334, 406-408, 410  
 Henderson, James, 66, 70, 85-86  
 Henderson, T., 378  
 Henry, R. M., 384  
 Hierarchy, 31, 32, 238  
 Hill, W. E., 295, 315-316, 317, 318  
 Hodges, F., 424  
 Home Rule, 21, 162, 287, 289, 303, 318, 331-332, 335, 401, 403, 412, 415, 419  
 Home Rule Bill, see Government of Ireland Bill  
 Home Rule Party, see Irish Parliamentary Party  
 Hope, Jamie, 128  
 Horgan, 225  
 Houghton, Jeremiah, 65, 73, 74, 77, 85, 110-111, 115, 116  
 Housing, 119-121, 242, 442-444

- Howell, 119-121  
 Hudson, Wm., 196, 400  
 Hughes, James, 170  
 Hughes, J. J., 329  
 Hume, J., 73, 89, 116, 141  
 Huysmans, 334  
 Hyndley, 87, 136  
  
 Independent Labour Party, 207-208, 213, 218, 227, 295, 335, 349-350, 376, 378, 397-398  
 Industrial Development Association, 228, 264  
 Industrial Revolution, 58, 127, 156, 344, 474, 475  
 Ingram, Dr., 180  
 Irish Citizen Army, 287-288, 300, 301-304, 310, 312, 317-318, 331, 410  
 Irish Convention, 412  
 Irish Federation of Trade Unions, 204, 205, 395  
*Irish Freedom*, 281-287, 311  
*Irish Independent*, 31, 243, 313  
 Irish Irelanders, 213, 264, 277  
 Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 320-323, 325-327, 327-329, 335-336, 339-342, 362, 437-438, 455; and British Labour, 412-414, 418-420, 422-424, 433; and elections, 342-343, 455-458, 466-467; and the Irish Government, 439-441, 446-449, 450, 459-460, 462-463, 471-472  
 —, (1918 — Special), 325-327, 334-335, 338  
 —, (1919—Drogheda), 321  
 —, (1919—Special), 327  
 —, (1920 — Special), 342, 422, 433  
 —, (1921—Dublin), 320, 435-439  
 —, (1922 — Dublin), 447 - 448, 460-462  
 —, (1922—Special), 455-456  
 —, (1923—Dublin), 466  
*Irish Messenger*, 30, 31  
 Irish Parliament, 20, 23, 24, 33, 34, 41, 51, 52, 57, 107, 117, 128, 299; see also Dail Eireann, Oireachtas, Seanad Eireann  
 Irish Parliamentary Party, 126, 162, 163, 207, 238, 250, 251, 252, 253-256, 290, 292, 294, 318, 349, 351, 361, 377, 386, 399, 401, 475, and British Labour, 400, 402, 405, 405-409, 410-412, 477  
*Irish People*, 160-162  
 Irish Poor Law Commission (1836), 119-125  
 Irish Republic, 283, 284, 301, 303, 312, 335, 337, 338, 343, 365-366, 451-452  
 Irish Republican Army, 329, 445  
 Irish Republican Brotherhood, 301, 311  
 Irish Socialist Republican Party, 208-213, 259, 301  
*Irish Times*, 66, 173, 186, 242  
 Irish Trades Union Congress, 166, 186, 190-202, 348-349, 353, 359, 475; and British Labour, 187-188, 393, 395-396, 398, 401, 402, and Larkinism, 227-231, 248-249, and politics, 202-207, 213, 250-253, 255, 257, 287, 289-292  
 —, (1894—Dublin), 186, 190, 348  
 —, (1895—Cork), 190-191, 200-201  
 —, (1897—Waterford), 191-194  
 —, (1900—Dublin), 212  
 —, (1901—Sligo), 200, 206  
 —, (1902—Cork), 206-207, 251  
 —, (1903 — Newry), 198, 200, 201, 207, 251  
 —, (1904—Kilkenny), 213, 350-351  
 —, (1905 — Wexford), 194-195, 198-199, 202  
 —, (1906 — Athlone), 204-205, 207, 251-252  
 —, (1907—Dublin), 205, 395  
 —, (1908—Belfast), 227-228, 253  
 —, (1909—Limerick), 204, 229-230, 289  
 —, (1910—Dundalk), 231, 402  
 —, (1911—Galway), 248, 269  
 —, (1912—Clonmel), 248, 255, 289-290, 292, 404  
 —, (1913—Cork), 292  
 Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, 248-249, 295-297, 297-300, 320, 329-334; and British Labour, 404-409, 410-412; and elections, 306, 337-338  
 —, (1914 — Dublin), 248-249, 293-297, 383, 408  
 —, (1916—Sligo), 315-319, 325, 409

- , (1916—Special), 329
- , (1917—Derry), 320, 333-334
- , (1918—All-Ireland Labour Convention), 330
- , (1918—Waterford), 320, 334
- Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, 221, 230, 232, 235, 241, 269, 288, 303, 322, 323-324, 339, 445-446; in Belfast, 293-294, 353, 368, 369, 371, 373; and Citizen Army, 287, 300, 303, 317-318; and industrial disputes, 223-227, 239, 240-241, 243-246, 247, 300, 304, 305, 404, 435-436, 445; internal dissensions in, 464-466, 467-468; and Irish Trades Union Congress, 229-231, 293, 297, 300, 404, 459; and political action, 415, 449, 450, 457
- Irish Typographical Union, 108-109
- Irish Volunteers, 303
- Irish Worker*, 243, 300, 466, 467-468
- Irish Workers' League, 467
- Jacob's biscuit strike, 236-237
- Jolly George, 340
- Johnson, Thomas, 314, 316, 320, 328, 456, 461; and British Labour, 291, 294, 413, 414; and the Government, 439-440, 447-448, 450, 456, 460, 463; and international affairs, 334, 336; philosophy of, 295, 325, 327, 435-436, 445, 459
- Jones, J., 412
- Jowett, F. W., 434
- Kavanagh, James, 80-82, 102, 106
- Kennedy, T., 465, 466
- Kerenski Revolution, 333
- Kettle, T. M., 254
- Khaki Election, 374, 376
- Kilkenny, 184, 191, 194, 290; see also I. T. U. C. (1904)
- Kilkenny Trades Council, 253
- King Dan, see O'Connell, Daniel
- Knocklong, 435-436
- Kyle, S., 376
- Labouchere, 87
- Labourers' Society, 170
- Labour Party (Great Britain), 207, 229, 239, 278, 279, 300, 327, 477, and Irish Labour, 251, 252, 253, 291, 292, 294, 314-315, 400-401, 404-405, 405-409, 410-412, 413-414; and Irish Nation, 331, 335, 401-402, 409-414, 432-434; and Irish Party, 291-292, 400, 402, 405, 408, 410-412
- Labour Party (Northern Ireland), 379, 384
- Labour Representation Committee, 207, 251, 351, 398, 399, 400, 401
- Lagan, 347, 354
- Lalor, J. F., 130, 148, 152, 156-159, 162, 212, 263
- Land laws, 19, 179, 390
- Land League, 19, 51, 162, 301
- Larkin, James, 215, 297, 320, 343, 476, Irish organiser of N. U. D. L., 214, 215-221, 268-269, 353, 361, 368, General Secretary of I. T. & G. W. U., 223-226, 232, 246, 260, 274-275, 285, 288, 300, 311, 463-466; at Irish Trade Union Congress, 228-229, 229-230, 244, 248, 299, 293, 300; and British Labour, 291, 294, 308, 404; Commandant of Citizen Army, 288, 302, 303; and Workers' Union, 467
- Larkinism, 221-223, 230, 242-243, 246, 248, 251
- Lawlor, T., 298
- Leahy, C., 76, 77
- Leahy, G., 252-253
- Leahy, M., 204
- Lecky, 176
- Lenin, 334, 445
- Leo XIII, 238
- Leo, P. J., 191-194
- Leslie, John, 208
- Liberator, see O'Connell, Daniel
- Liberties, see Coombe
- Liberty Hall, 242, 300, 302, 303, 304, 310, 317, 464, 466
- Limerick, 23, 55, 171, 184, 194, 195, 339, 344, 347; see also I. T. U. C. (1909)
- Linen industry (Belfast), 354-358, 363
- Litvinoff, 334
- Liverpool, 74, 191
- Lobe, D. G., 106
- Local Government Act, 21, 250, 350, 397

- Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, Amalgamated Society of, 238, 239, 293, 421  
 Logue, Cardinal, 238, 262  
 Londonderry, 184, 191, 194, 195, 221, 344, 347, 364-365, see also I. T. U. C. & L. P. (1917)  
 Lumley, L., 295  
 Lynch, P., 204  
 Lynn, Sir Robert, 377, 379, 382, 386  
  
 MacDonald, Ramsay, 335, 398, 405-406, 408-409  
 MacIntyre, P. J., 269  
 Mackay, 96-97  
 Mackie, Wm., 74, 80, 118  
 MacPartlin, T., 297, 462  
 MacPiarais, Padraig, see Pearse, Patrick  
 MacSwiney, Mary, 379, 472  
 Malone, C. L'E., 371  
 Manchester trades' union, 140  
 Mann, Tom, 221-222  
 Markievicz, Constance de, 303, 472  
 Martin, J., 138  
 Marx, K., 210  
 Maxwell, Shaw, 397  
 May Day demonstration, 339-340  
 Maynooth, 18, 238, 345  
 McBride, Major, 256  
 M'Caffrey, Dr., 238  
 McCaghey, Inspector, 360  
 McCarron, James, 196, 200, 201-202, 204, 206, 212, 228, 230, 231, 255, 297, 320, 403  
 McCarthy, Michael, 465  
 McConnell, T. E., 378  
 M'Cormac, Wm., 96-97  
 McGuffin, S., 374, 376  
 McKenna, Father L., S.J., 32  
 M'Keon, Sean, 449  
 McLoughlin, W., 212  
 McManus, Hugh, 184, 186, 187, 196, 204, 348  
 McMullen, 386  
 Mellowes, Liam, 451  
 Mercer, J., 295  
 Midgley, H., 377, 378, 379, 386  
 Military permits strike, 339  
 Milner, T., 292  
 Miners' Federation, 396, 424  
 Mitchel, John, 146, 148-152, 159, 210, 212, 246, 267  
  
 Monro, Samuel, 183, 206, 392-393  
 Montefiore, Mrs., 31  
 Moore, Acheson, 71-72, 77, 102, 109, 116, 117  
 Moriarty, Biddy, 141  
 Morton, 63-65  
 Mosses, W., 396  
 Mountjoy strike, 340  
 Mulgrave, Lord, 135  
 Munitions strike, 340-342, 414-424  
 Murphy, John (Belfast), 227, 228, 230, 252, 292  
 Murphy, John (Dublin), 177-178, 182  
 Murphy, P., 224, 225  
 Murphy, William Martin, 238, 243, 260, 291, 304, 309, 313, 337  
 Murray, Archbishop, 140  
 Murray, Edward, 79-80, 93  
 Murray, Garrett, 79, 94  
  
 Nannetti, J. P., 162, 178, 252, 306  
 Nash, P., 379  
 National Council of Sinn Fein, 264, 268  
 National University of Ireland, 18, 440, 443  
 National Volunteers, 287  
 Nationalist Party, see Irish Parliamentary Party  
 Natural laws, 128, 133-134  
 Newry, 184, 290; see also I. T. U. C. (1903)  
 Newry Commercial Telegraph, 66, 70, 85-86, 109  
 Nolan, 309  
 Nolan, J., 290  
 Northern Government, administration, 385-386; elections, 375, 376-377; legislation, 383-384, 468, 471  
 Northern Whig, 67, 86, 93, 109, 215, 223, 377, 382  
 Northman, 282-283  
 November Revolution, 333-334  
 Nugent, John Dillon, 238, 306  
  
 O'Brien, Bronterre, 146  
 O'Brien, Cruise, 241  
 O'Brien, George, 26, 27  
 O'Brien, Sir Lucius, 48  
 O'Brien, William Smith, 159  
 O'Brien, William, M.P., 162  
 O'Brien, William, 213, 293, 314, 333, 334, 413, 461, 464, 465, 466, 467

- O'Callaghan, 467  
 O'Carroll, R., 314, 317  
 O'Casey, Sean, 284, 303  
 O'Cathasaigh, Sean, see O'Casey, Sean  
 O'Connell, Daniel, 17, 20, 21, 23, 27, 130-137, 145, 146, 148, 172, 283, 284; and trade unionism, 28, 62, 63, 64, 68, 70, 82, 87, 91, 93, 96, 98, 103, 105, 107, 137-144  
 O'Connell, T., 190  
 O'Connor, Arthur, 133  
 O'Connor, Feargus, 145, 161  
 O'Connor, J., 241  
 O'Flanagan, M., 318-319  
 O'Flannagain, Miceal, 265-266  
 O'hAodha, Seamus, 280  
 O'Lehane, M.J., 290, 321, 322, 404  
 O'Meara, 237  
 O'Neill, John, 465  
 O'Neill, Owen Roe, 130  
 O'Shannon, Cathal, 336, 467  
 O'Shea, P.J., 263  
 Oireachtas, 54, 463; see also Dail Eireann, Seanad Eireann  
 One Big Union, 321, 436  
 Orangeism, 92, 135, 144, 217, 354, 361, 364, 365, 367, 371  
 Painters, Amalgamated Society of, 189, 195, 394  
 Painters, Belfast, 189, 394-395  
 Painters, Dublin, 77, 394-395  
 Palmer, Abraham, 122  
 Panel, 457-459  
 Pankhurst, Sylvia, 412  
 Parliament (Westminster), 55, 374-375, 416, 468, 471  
 Parliamentary Labour Party, 291, 405-407, 433  
 Parnell, C. S., 21, 162, 238, 250, 275, 277, 301, 313  
 Partition, 287, 298-300, 318, 319, 383, 408-409  
 Partition Act, see Government of Ireland Bill  
 Partridge, W., 303, 304  
 Pearse, Patrick, 275, 285, 311, 336, 434, 459  
 Pim, 176  
 Plunkett, Sir Horace, 20, 263  
*Poblacht na hEireann*, 451-452, 457  
 Poor Law, 97, 135  
 Pope's Brass Band, 21, 91, 133  
 Pork butchers (Limerick), 244  
 Porter, R. C., 376  
 Price, Major, 317  
 Printers, Society of, 66-70, 99, 100-101, 105, 113-114; see also Typographical Provident Society, Dublin, and Irish Typographical Union  
 Prior, John G., 178-179  
 Pro-Cathedral, 443  
 Protestant Ascendancy, 18, 46, 48, 221, 413  
 Provisional Government, 445, 450, 452, 458, 462-463  
 Queen's College, 18  
 Rail strike, Irish (1911), 237-240, 253-254, 273, 282, 403  
 Railway Clerks' Association, 293, 321, 327  
 Railway Servants, Amalgamated Society of, 186, 191, 194, 195, 236, 238, 239, 273, 293, 400  
 Railwaymen, National Union of, 293, 304, 321, 341, 369-370, 414-426  
 Rapparee, 283, 285  
 Red Flag, 176  
 Redmond, John, 162, 254, 262, 290-291, 408, 410, 432  
 Regan, Robert, 92, 107  
 Reilly, T. D., 152-156  
 Repeal, 133, 134, 135, 145  
 Repeal Association, 20  
 Repealers, 126, 134, 145-146  
 Republicans, 300, 311-312, 419; and Sinn Fein, 247, 281, 287, 312, 476  
 Republican Party, 379, 441, 450-452, 453, 458, 466, 472-473  
 Ribbonism, 94, 141  
 Richardson, E. L., 201, 228, 231, 257-258  
 Richmond, Alexander, 111-112  
 Riordan, E. J., 28  
 Rising, see Easter Week  
 Roberts, 406  
 Royal Dublin Society, 28  
 Royal Irish Constabulary, 218, 391  
 Russell, G. W. (Æ), 215, 244-246, 247-248, 255, 267, 287, 327  
 Russell, T. W., 250  
 Ryan, Frederick, 256, 259-261  
 Ryan, Matthew, 109  
 Ryan, W. P., 31



- Saddlers, 75, 77, 103, 117  
 Sailors and Firemen, National Union of, 315, 334  
 St. Patrick's Cathedral, 172, 443  
 Samaritan Society, 76, 104  
*Saorstát*, 453-454  
 Saorstát Éireann, 21, 343, 433, 444, 468-472, 477-478; see also Oireachtas, Provisional Government  
 Scottish Labour Party, 295, 408  
 Scottish Trades Union Congress, 193, 199, 396  
 Seanad Éireann, 461, 463  
 Seery, Luke, 93, 95, 107  
 Senior, Nassau W., 28, 174-175  
*Separatist*, 452-453  
 Sexton, James, 219, 221, 229, 369, 400, 402  
 Shanley, 169  
 Shaw, G. B., 181, 276  
 Sheares, 131  
 Sheehy-Skeffington, F., 303, 409  
 Sheehy-Skeffington, Mrs., 379  
 Sheil, R. L., 132, 141, 145  
 Sheldon, R., 186-187, 190, 393  
 Shipbuilding, 24, 62-65, 363  
 Shipping Federation, 224, 226  
 Shipton, George, 221  
 Shipwrights' Association, 190, 426  
 Shop Assistants, National Amalgamated Union of, 322-323  
 Simmons, John, 186, 393  
 Sinn Féin, 331, 346, 364, 411, 453-454, 455, 457, 472, 475-476; in Belfast, 365-367, 370, 372, 377, 379; and Labour, 126, 204, 265, 287, 312, 336-338, 379, 388, 402, 476; and Republicanism, 247, 281, 287, 311, 312, 476  
*Sinn Féin*, 221, 238, 264-281, 282, 336  
 Sinn Féiners, 162, 230, 277, 284, 363  
 Sirocco Works, 293-294, 370, 371, 429  
 Sirr, Major, 129, 132  
 Sligo, 184, 290; see also I. T. U. C. (1901) and I. T. U. C. & L. P. (1916)  
 Smillie, Robert, 389  
 Smith, Adam, 50  
 Smyth, Colonel, 367  
*Social Action Series*, 29  
 Social Democratic Federation, 208  
 Socialism, 31, 201, 207-213, 232, 263, 273-274, 278, 284, 285, 287, 311, 336, 349, 472  
 Socialists, 126, 152, 176, 227, 230, 250, 259, 263-264, 282, 345, 361, 366, 375, 397, 407  
 Socialist Party of Ireland, 213, 232, 335, 455  
 Somerset, Lord Granville, 67, 82  
 Soviet Government of Russia, 334, 336, 447-448  
 State Trials, 143  
 Staunton, Michael, 66-67, 69-70, 85, 92  
 Steam Packet Company, Cork, 224, 227, 269  
 Stephens, James, 159-160  
 Stewart, E. W., 212, 228  
 Stockholm Conference, 333  
 Stockport Election, 413, 432  
 Stoker, Dr., 122  
 Summers, J., 175  
 Sweetman, 238  
 Tailors, Amalgamated Society of, 191, 194, 204  
 Taylor, Alex, 200  
 Terror, 339, 342, 364, 423, 432, 445, 476  
 Thomas, J. H., 144, 369, 415, 417, 419, 422, 423, 426, 433  
 Thompson, Poulett, 136  
 Thompson, R., 352  
 Thorne, Will, 403  
 Tillet, Ben, 221, 388  
 Timber-trade dispute, 237-240  
*Times*, 161, 177, 390  
 Titanic, 354  
 Tone, Wolfe, 127, 146, 211-212  
 Trades Political Union, see Dublin Trades Political Union  
 Trades Union Congress (British), 176, 181, 185-186, 187-189, 193, 205, 229, 268, 305, 314, 331, 348, 388, 390-394, 395-397, 403, 404-405, 411  
 —, (1868), 171, 389  
 —, (1877), 177, 390  
 —, (1879), 390  
 —, (1880), 177-181, 203, 390  
 —, (1882), 182, 390  
 —, (1883), 181-182, 185, 390  
 —, (1886), 390-391

- , (1887), 183
- , (1893), 184-185, 203, 206, 349, 361, 392-393
- , (1894), 186-187, 190, 393
- , (1895), 393-394
- , (1896), 189, 394
- , (1898), 395-396
- , (1912), 403-404
- , (1916), 409
- , (1918), 412
- , (1920—Special), 417-422
- , (1920), 426-430
- , (1921), 431-432
- Transport Workers' Federation, 418-419, 424
- Transport Workers' Union, see Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
- Travers, 366
- Treaty, see Articles of Agreement
- Trench, Archbishop, 172
- Triple Alliance, 305-306, 415, 416-417, 417-418
- Trotsky, 334
- Tyne, 65, 413-414
- Typographical Association, 191, 195
- \*Typographical Provident Society, Dublin, 178, 393, 394, 395
- Ulster, 24, 282, 294, 298-299, 363
- Ulster Covenanters, 287, 299
- Ulster Labour Party, see Ulster Unionist Labour Association
- Ulster Protestant Association, 371
- Ulster Times*, 93
- Ulster Unionist Council, 371, 375
- Ulster Unionist Labour Association, 367, 372, 373-375, 377
- Ulster Volunteers, 367, 368
- Union, 18, 23, 55, 106, 126, 131-132, 134, 210, 289, 374, 432, 475
- Union duties, 74
- Unionists, 21, 250, 251, 252, 318, 346, 370, 372, 374-375, 377, 379, 386, 399
- United Irish League, 258, 306
- United Irishman*, 210, 256-264
- United Irishmen, 20, 126, 127-130, 131, 162
- United Trades' Association, Dublin, 161, 167-176, 203
- Unity Hall, 467
- Victoria, Queen, 256
- Voice of Labour*, 337, 343, 368, 445-446, 449, 450-451, 452, 455, 464, 466
- Volunteers, 126, 127
- Walker, Wm., 213, 350-352, 378, 396-397, 400-401
- Wallace, Rev. Bruce, 349
- Walsh, Archbishop, 31, 255, 281
- Ward, John, 178
- Waterford, 23, 55, 63-64, 184, 191, 194, 347; see also I. T. U. C. (1897, 1918)
- Watkins, John, 72, 76
- Webb, J. J., 28
- Webb, S. & B., 24, 27, 28, 98, 99, 142, 327
- Welters, 94
- Wexford, 290; see also I. T. U. C. (1905)
- Wexford lock-out, 240-241, 271-272, 274, 290
- Whately, Archbishop, 180
- White, Captain, 302-303
- Whitfield, 396
- Whitley, H. S., 289, 294, 295, 298, 299, 333
- Willans, Obadiah, 73, 77, 84-85, 110
- Williams, Robert, 234-235, 230, 424
- Wilson, Havelock, 304
- Women Workers' Union, Irish, 322
- Woods, Sam, 205
- Woodworkers, Amalgamated Society of, 430-432
- Workers' Educational Association, Belfast, 380-382
- Workers' Republic*, 210-211, 301, 303, 310, 338, 455, 467, 478
- Workers' Union, 224, 226, 231, 269
- Workers' Union of Ireland, 467-468
- Workman, Clark & Co., 364, 367, 368, 427, 429
- Wyndham, 197-198
- Young Ireland, 20, 126, 146-159, 162, 311

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